

THE RED BAND

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CHAPTER I.

THE night was cold and dark.

The giant trees in the forest of Saint Germain, shaken by the autumnal gale, groaned dismally as their tall tops bent and swayed over a narrow and lonely road.

Occasionally a still stronger gust of wind drove away the clouds, and the moonlight gleamed through the leaves, and then one caught sight of a peculiarly shaped vehicle making its way laboriously along the rough road.

It was ~~not~~ a carriage, nor was it a wagon. It looked like a long box, surmounted in front by a chimney, and with long narrow openings in the sides.

It seemed to be a house on wheels, and it was certainly inhabited, for from the openings came flashes of light that illuminated the shrubbery on either side of the road as it passed.

The rough and stony ravine through which this strange vehicle was slowly wending its way made a sharp turn after passing a clump of oaks, and then came a steep hill.

At the foot of this hill there was a moment's halt, followed by a wild plunging of horse's hoofs, then the odd vehicle, which had doubtless encountered some unforeseen obstacle, suddenly keeled over on one side like a vessel struck by a flaw of wind, and remained propped against an enormous stump which seemed to have been placed there expressly to prevent it from capsizing completely.

«ille tannerres!» yelled a voice from the interior of the conveyance, "the fool has certainly upset us."

A doleful groan from the front of the vehicle followed this exclamation, but nothing moved.

The driver seemed to have no intention of getting himself fallen steed upon its feet again, and the unfortunate animal appeared comparatively resigned to its fate, for it contented itself with neighing loudly without making any futile efforts to rise.

"Alcindor!" yelled the same harsh voice. "Don't you hear me, good-for-nothing?"

At the same instant the door at the back of the vehicle was thrown open and a man leaped to the ground and ran to the scene of the catastrophe.

In his left hand was a lantern, which he thrust in the driver's face, and in his right a long cane, with which he began to strike him smartly on the legs.

The effect of this attack was instantaneous.

The driver drew back at first, dazzled by the light, but as soon as he felt the blows he dropped the reins and jumped down on the other side of the vehicle.

He did not seem particularly surprised or alarmed, however, for he seated himself on the side of the ditch and put his hands in his pockets like a man accustomed to such correction.

He was a thin, cadaverous-looking fellow, whose extremely short body rested upon a pair of interminable legs. He had long hair of a pale yellow tint, a chalk-like, beardless face, a small, pointed nose, and bulging gray eyes.

His habitual expression of countenance was one of resignation, mingled with a sort of repressed enthusiasm. A shrewd physiognomist would have detected under this mask a visionary who concealed his dreams, or an inventor who was ashamed of his inventions.

As for his costume, it was simple but grotesque. A pair of faded trousers covered the long and attenuated limbs

which terminated in immense feet, incased in shoes of the coarsest leather. Over his bony shoulders floated a large cape, and his head was covered with a shabby cap.

This strange being was evidently young in spite of his antiquated garb; and his master, the man who had just leaped from the vehicle, was a striking contrast to him in every respect.

Tall, square-shouldered and powerfully built, he was the very type of the athlete one sees at country fairs. His powerful biceps and enormous calves were plainly visible even through his ill-cut velvet suit, but by a strange freak of nature his regular and rather effeminate features revealed an utter lack of energy, while his affected bearing and carefully combed whiskers gave him the appearance of a dapper dry-goods clerk disguised as an athlete.

He had folded his arms, and was now contemplating with a decidedly tragical air the tall, yellow-haired booby, and the recumbent horse who was already philosophically nibbling the grass by the road-side.

But his ominous silence was not of long duration, and he resumed his remarks in the husky voice common to persons who are in the habit of talking a great deal in the open air.

"Poltroon!" he cried, brandishing his cane, "how ever did you manage to upset the wagon into a ditch upon a macadamized road, in the heart of an imperial forest. You certainly must have been asleep, sound asleep, like the idiot that you are!"

"Master," replied the unfortunate coachman in a drawling, monotonous tone, "so far as being asleep is concerned I do not deny the charge. Sleep is a necessity of the human organization which is always proportionate to the age of the individual, and as I have just concluded my twenty-sixth year, I have a right to at least eight hours of repose. Now we left the fair at Poissy exactly at midnight; and if I may judge by the position of the Great Bear rela-

tive to the zenith, it must now be about six o'clock in the morning, so I have only obeyed the dictates of nature."

"But you haven't obeyed me, you infernal scoundrel," interrupted the bearded man. "I don't hire you to sleep. We have lost our way—that is certain—for we ought to have been at Saint Germain a long time ago. If I had not been foolish enough to go to sleep, too, I should have discovered the fact before."

"You, master, who are forty-seven years old, require only six hours of sleep," observed the coachman.

"Do, for Heaven's sake, hold your tongue," said the master, angrily, "and take the lantern and walk on ahead, so I can have a little idea where I am going. Regina," he cried, turning to the vehicle, "Regina, my girl, stay there, my girl. I will soon be back."

No one replied, and the Hercules said to himself, with a shrug of the shoulders—

"What a fool I am! I am always forgetting that the child is deaf and dumb. Come, Alcindor, come on!"

The possessor of this romantic name obeyed without making any reply. The road, badly washed by recent rains, was detestable; and the employer, who was much less nimble in his movements than the attenuated Alcindor, stumbled at every step, and uttered a formidable volley of oaths at each mishap.

After ten minutes of this difficult progress, they came to an opening surrounded by venerable trees, from which five or six different roads radiated, and in the center of which stood a guide-post.

"We are saved! here is a guide-post!" exclaimed Alcindor, quickening his pace. As he spoke, he lifted his lantern high in the air, and he finally succeeded in deciphering the inscription—

"'Etoile du Chêne-Capitaine.' What a pretty name!" he exclaimed. "There must be some legend connected with it. If I had time I would write a romance about it."

"Silence, fool!" growled his employer; "you had better find our road, instead of talking so much nonsense."

"That is no easy matter, master," plaintively murmured Alcindor, scratching his head. "But look! there is a light," he added, pointing to a road leading to the left.

"It must be some wood-cutter's hut. We are lucky indeed. Come on," said the athlete, gayly, evidently encouraged by this unexpected piece of good fortune.

Alcindor, however, did not move, for the light, which was quite a distance off, seemed to be moving about, and sometimes entirely disappeared from sight.

"That is strange," remarked his companion, when his attention was called to the fact. "It may be the torch of some gamekeeper who is making his nightly round. We had better get near enough to see without being seen. Let us put out our lantern and walk softly."

Alcindor imitated the movements of his master, who had already started toward the light, adopting all the precautions usually practiced by poachers.

The weather, too, was very favorable to this attempted reconnaissance. The storm had increased in fury, and the sound of their footsteps was drowned by the moaning of the wind through the trees; so they reached the edge of a recent clearing without revealing their approach. Even there they found that the light was still some distance from them, but the sound of regular and measured footsteps was distinctly audible to the keen ears of these eager listeners.

Alcindor, thanks to his long legs, could see the furthest, and what he saw must have been quite alarming in its nature, for after a moment he seized his master's arm and whispered excitedly, "Let us run, master, let us run!"

"What has come over you, idiot?" muttered the athlete.

"Look!" murmured Alcindor, pointing to a colossal oak that stood alone in the center of the clearing, "look, they are burying somebody."

"Or something," growled the master, who did not seem to share his companion's dismay. And creeping stealthily along, the athlete succeeded in making his way to the shelter of a large rock, from which he could distinctly see what was going on about twenty yards from him.

The light which had attracted him and his driver to the spot came from a large lantern that was hanging upon one of the lower branches of the tree, beneath which two men, each armed with a spade, were engaged in filling up a long and narrow opening in the ground.

At such an hour and in such a spot this seemed a very strange task, especially as these workers were neither laborers nor peasants. Clad in long frock-coats, buttoned tightly to the chin, and in trim silk hats that shone brightly in the light of the lantern, they seemed to have arrayed themselves carefully for some ceremony, and their semi-official costume contrasted strikingly with the manual labor they were performing with so much ardor. One of them had even neglected to remove his gloves, and was handling the spade with hands incased in black kids.

The air of profound secrecy with which they were surrounded was evident, but it was difficult to divine the real object of their efforts, for their task was nearly completed when Alcindor discovered them, and the loose earth which had been replaced with so much alacrity might conceal either a corpse or a box of treasure.

Alcindor, who had crept cautiously to his master's side, was under the spell of a terror which was the more intolerable from the fact that he dared give vent to it neither in words nor in gestures. He felt convinced that he was witnessing the last scene of a tragedy which would inevitably be unraveled before the Court of Assizes, and, instinctively fearing legal proceedings of any sort, he secretly cursed the accident which had brought him to the Etoile du Chêne-Capitaine.

His employer, on the contrary, wore the eminently satis-

fied air of a speculator who has just discovered an excellent investment. He evidently thought he had a secret from which he could subsequently coin money, and troubled himself very little about the immediate consequences of his indiscretion.

"They have finished, master; let us get away as soon as we can," whispered the unfortunate lad.

The task did indeed seem completed; and the man wearing the black gloves had folded his arms like a workman resting after an arduous task. His companion, however, instantly set to work to cover the freshly stirred earth with leaves; and he labored with such remarkable zeal and dexterity that in less than a quarter of an hour the soil was leveled and the place covered with a thick layer of autumn leaves, and so adroitly was the work done that no one save a witness of the strange scene would have suspected the mysterious interment which had just been accomplished. Then, while he was hiding the spades in some bushes on the edge of the clearing, the man who had been standing under the tree extinguished the lantern, and the disappearance of this artificial light made the first faint light of dawn more perceptible.

After taking these precautions, the two men rejoined each other, and directed their course toward the very spot where the terrified Alcindor and his master were standing. They walked along, side by side, slowly and silently, like persons absorbed in thought. The taller of the two, the one who carried the lantern, was of medium height, slender, and distinguished in bearing. The other, who appeared much older, had a large head buried between shoulders of unequal height, and though he did not exactly limp, his gait was peculiar, and gave a person the impression that one leg was shorter than the other.

This was all the athlete had a chance to notice, for, seeing the strangers approach, he hastily crouched under some bushes, and Alcindor lost no time in following his example;

After a moment of waiting, which was by no means free from anxiety, the sound of a shrill voice met their ears.

"We sha'n't have long to wait," said the speaker. "The meeting is to be at five o'clock, and Saint Senior will be punctual, like the fool of a soldier that he is. Let us remain here. This is a good place to rest, and you certainly must feel a need of it."

"Yes, I am rather afraid that I have overtired my arm," replied a graver voice.

"I told you to let me do the shoveling, but you wouldn't listen to me."

"I don't know why it is," replied the other, "but I never felt in worse trim. The damp weather of late has unsettled my nerves, to say nothing of the fact that Rose has been decidedly out of sorts for two days past, and treated me to a scene last night."

"Smoke a cigar, and let women alone if you desire to become a political magnate."

This wise counsel was not very graciously received.

"Taupier, my friend," replied the other, "you are simply a fool, and that you certainly have no right to be, being a hunchback."

"Thanks," growled the person thus classified.

"Don't thank me, but merely answer me. Of what earthly use is it to have money and fame if one is obliged to renounce the society of the ladies?"

"I have renounced it."

"I am not so sure of that. It is said that you are in love with the fair Renée, my opponent's sister. I even heard the other day that you had been seen waiting at the door of the Madeleine after mass to offer your divinity the holy water."

"It is false."

"Oh, don't get angry. I'll take it all back, and deny the report everywhere, if you like."

"I am sure I wish you would, but now you had better

think only of taking such good aim as will effectually rid me of this Saint Senier, who is certainly very much in my way."

After this response, there was a silence, which afforded the athlete an opportunity for reflection. To tell the truth, he was deeply disappointed, for what he had just overheard furnished no clew to the mystery. This fact, however, made him only the more anxious to listen to the end, in the hope that some chance remark might put him on the track.

"I feel sure, however, that I shall not miss my aim, and that he will be the one to fall," remarked the gloved man slowly. "Why did you consent to the use of pistols?"

"Because you are a tolerable shot, while you have been wounded in every duel you have fought with the sword."

"My father died from a bullet, and I have a presentiment that I shall end in the same way."

"Your father died upon a barricade, and the days of barricades are past now, for we are living under a republic."

"Who can say? France was also a republic on the 24th of June, 1848, the very day my father was shot in the back, at the entrance into the Faubourg du Temple."

"How strange it is that you should think of that to-day," remarked Taupier, with evident dissatisfaction. "But steady your nerves, Valnoir. I hear footsteps approaching, and it is probably Saint Senier arriving with his seconds."

"Who is to fire first?"

"He is. Your article was so offensive that he justly considers himself the aggrieved party."

"Then I am a dead man."

"Oh, I'll take care to prevent that," muttered Taupier, between his set teeth, but not low enough for his words to escape the ears of the athlete who was listening with breathless eagerness.

Day had dawned—a dull cloudy day. The wind had

abated, the rain had ceased, but though the moisture was still dripping softly from the leaves, in the comparative silence footsteps could be heard at quite a long distance; still it was only a moment or two before the new arrivals made their appearance at the other end of the clearing.

There were three of them—a very young officer, whose ample cloak nearly concealed his uniform, and two older men, whose military bearing did not correspond with the civilian's garb they wore.

The taller of these two men wore in his button-hole the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor, and his fair whiskers, trimmed in the English fashion, indicated plainly the branch of the service to which he must belong. In a naval officer alone could be united these three conditions, an absence of mustaches, this decoration, and the rather stern and stiff manner which the habit of command imparts.

The other, with his smoothly shaven cheeks, and sharply pointed mustache and goatee, strongly resembled one of the famous guards of Henry III.; while his olive complexion and the quickness of his movements betrayed his southern descent.

This gentleman carried under his arm a long flat box that undoubtedly contained a pair of pistols. The little party was met in the middle of the clearing by the two gentlemen who seemed to have been waiting for them; but after bowing to each other with the grave politeness customary on such occasions, the naval officer and the gloved gentleman each retired a short distance from the other members of the group. They evidently were the two opponents.

The other three, as good luck would have it, approached the spot where Alcindor and his master were crouching, to hold a consultation.

The holder of the box of pistols seemed to have assumed the direction of affairs, and he began by introducing the two seconds to each other.

"Monsieur Pierre Taupier, man of letters; Monsieur Roger de Saint Senier, lieutenant in the Civil Guard," he said, with a volubility which was perhaps not entirely free from embarrassment.

The young officer bowed coldly, without uttering a word, but Valnoir's friend asked hastily.

"Then monsieur is the brother of Commander Saint Senier, I presume?"

"On the contrary, monsieur is the commander's cousin, and he comes here rather in the character of a relative than a second, as Valnoir has not had time to secure another," replied the southerner.

"Very well, my dear Podensac, then it is with you alone that I am to decide upon the rules that are to govern the affair, I suppose?"

"They have already been settled. Being the offended party, as Monsieur Charles de Valnoir himself admits, Commander Louis de Saint Senier has a right to every possible advantage in the ensuing combat. He has chosen the pistol, as you are aware, and he is to have the first shot. They are to fight at a distance of twenty-five paces, fire at the word of command, and if three shots are exchanged without effect, the affair is to be considered ended. Is not this the understanding?"

The other second made a sign of assent.

"In view of the gravity of the offense," continued Podensac, "I think it is useless to hope that the difference can be satisfactorily adjusted in any other way."

"Perfectly useless, sir," replied the young officer. "My relative is very grateful to you for having kindly consented to act as his second, but it is his express wish that there should be no attempt at a reconciliation."

"That is exactly what I supposed, lieutenant."

"I should add, however," continued the young officer, "that if this encounter should prove fatal to my relative, I, myself, intend to demand satisfaction of Monsieur de

Valnoir. He has insulted a person bearing my name, so the commander is not the only person involved—”

“Excuse me, excuse me,” interrupted Taupier, “but one is not obliged to fight but once for the same offense; besides, it is contrary to custom—”

“This is certainly a point that can be discussed later,” interposed Podensac, who seemed anxious to have the affair over with. “While we load the pistols, will you, sir, measure off the distance?” he added, turning to the young officer.

The latter bowed his acquiescence.

“What the devil induced you to bring that young fool of an officer?” growled Taupier, as soon as Lieutenant de Saint Senier was out of hearing. “We had enough soldiers mixed up in the affair already without him.”

“You journalists are all alike,” replied Podensac, shrugging his shoulders. “How could I prevent the commander from bringing his cousin. Besides, I advise you not to speak slightly of the military. I am almost sure to be elected colonel of the *enfants perdus* of the Rue Maubouée, so you owe me a certain amount of respect, as well as a complimentary notice in your stupid old paper.”

“We will see about that,” said Taupier, evidently not in the best of humor. “Open that box, and let me load the pistols.”

“You! you would be quite capable of putting in the bullets before you did the powder.”

Taupier’s gray eyes flashed fire, and his face assumed a livid hue.

“Citizen Podensac,” he hissed through his set teeth, “I am your superior officer, and I warn you that I shall report your insolence to the committee.”

The man with the pointed beard hesitated an instant, but the hunchback’s threat had produced its effect, and he finally obeyed, growling:

"Yes, yes. I know it. The civil element is to govern the martial, and I am only a plain trooper. Here are the pistols. All that it is necessary to do is to load them, and I can certainly trust you to do that in a perfectly fair manner. A duel, you know, is a sacred thing, even when one is fighting with a political enemy."

Taupier stole a furtive glance at Podensac as he took the open box the latter extended.

"Will you kindly fetch that handsome young fellow?" he remarked. "I see he has just finished measuring the distance, and I want him to witness the operation. Where are the bullets?"

"Here are six."

As soon as the prospective colonel of the strange regiment recruited on the Rue Maubuce had turned away, Taupier hastily set the box down on the grass, picked up one of the pistols and began to load it.

Contrary to Podensac's laughing prediction, he began by pouring in the powder, however.

When he had reached this stage of the operation, he cast a hurried glance about him.

Valnoir was promenading to and fro on the other side of the clearing; young Lieutenant de Saint Senier had just finished measuring the distance, and was now talking with his cousin, who was standing at the foot of the giant oak.

Podensac was about to join them.

In the twinkling of an eye, the hunchback, who had been holding a bullet between his thumb and finger, tossed it into the very clump of shrubbery in which Alcindor and his master were hiding, and with a dexterity that would have done honor to a professional prestidigitateur, substituted for it a round object which he hastily rammed down into the barrel; after which, he quietly laid the weapon on the grass, and picked up the other pistol.

By a strange chance, the bullet struck Alcindor full in the face, and he uttered a moan that was promptly stifled.

by an imperious gesture from his master; nevertheless Taupier would certainly have noticed it had not his attention been directed elsewhere.

The opponents, accompanied by their seconds, were approaching, and he was furtively watching them.

"My work is completed, gentlemen. Would you like to examine the weapons?" he remarked, addressing the young officer, who, instead of replying, examined the triggers, measured the height of the charges, which proved to be identical, and returned the pistols to Taupier.

There was a moment of embarrassing silence. The hunchback lowered his eyes, as he stood, holding the weapons in his right hand, which trembled visibly. He seemed afraid to offer to these men the weapons upon which their lives depended. But suddenly he raised his head as if he had made a sudden resolve, and said brusquely:

"Choose, gentlemen!"

Valnoir bowed politely, and left the first choice to his opponent, who took the weapon nearest him without even glancing at it.

"Yes," muttered the concealed athlete, who had watched the minutest detail of the whole scene with the closest attention, "I know the trick. It is the marked card."

Alcindor, who was still lying tranquilly upon his back, saw none of these maneuvers which interested his employer so deeply, though a closer observer than the athlete would certainly have judged by certain nervous tremors which occasionally passed over him that this indifference was more apparent than real.

The *genouement* was rapidly approaching, for the two principals were already on their way to the places assigned them.

The naval officer was leaning upon his cousin's arm, and giving him some instructions with unruffled tranquillity. Valnoir was escorted by his friend Taupier, and his excited

gestures contrasted strikingly with M. de Saint-Senier's calm manner.

"Are they going to fire soon, master?" whispered Alcindor, without making the slightest change in his posture, however.

"You heard them, then?" growled the athlete, greatly surprised. "Well, I advise you to keep on playing dead."

"Oh, I am interested only from an acoustic point of view. Sound travels at the rate of about ten hundred and ninety feet a second, and I should like to calculate—"

This statement of the problem the reclining youth was anxious to solve was interrupted by the sonorous voice of Podensac, who, from his stand in the middle of the clearing, uttered the usual question—

"Are you ready, gentlemen?"

The combatants answered in the affirmative by a nod of the head.

"When I clap my hands for the third time, Monsieur de Saint Senier will fire," resumed Podensac, "and Monsieur de Valnoir is at liberty to immediately return the fire."

A few seconds of appalling silence followed. Steeled as he was against emotion of any kind, the athlete, though he did not once remove his eyes from the scene before him, passed his big hand hastily over his beard, a sure sign of intense excitement with him.

The clear trill of a lark that was singing in the branches was interrupted by the signal given by Podensac, and the naval officer's shot rang out simultaneously with the last clap of Podensac's hands.

"Missed!" muttered the athlete.

Valnoir had started slightly, but he retained his former erect position.

"That is strange!" murmured Alcindor, "I did not hear the bullet pass, so it is impossible for me to calculate the distance."

Almost instantly Valnoir fired with a haste that denoted a very meager amount of *sang-froid*.

"This time I heard the bullet whistle through the air," murmured the philosophical youth, "and the square of the distances—"

"*Mille tonnerres!* he is dead!" cried the athlete, forgetting that he might be overheard.

But his exclamation was drowned by the hubbub that followed the second shot, for M. de Saint Senier had fallen face downward upon the ground.

The seconds both sprung toward him at the same instant, and Valnoir threw away his pistol with a gesture of regret that was too spontaneous not to be sincere.

"He was killed instantly," whispered Podensac in Taupier's ear.

"Louis! Louis! speak to me!" cried the young lieutenant, seizing the hand of his unfortunate cousin whose death was only too certain, for his fixed eyes and the livid pallor that had overspread his face indicated plainly enough that he had been wounded in the immediate vicinity of the heart. The bleeding, too, had been almost entirely internal, and indicated an instantaneous death.

"He did not suffer, and surely soldiers like ourselves should envy him his end," resumed Podensac, who could find no other words of consolation to offer to the grief-stricken relative.

But the young officer did not seem to hear them. He had thrown himself down upon his knees beside the dead man, gazing at him with wild, despairing eyes, and repeating over and over again a woman's name: "*Renée! Renée!*"

After some rather constrained expressions of regret, Taupier deemed it advisable to leave the sorrowing group and rejoin his friend Valnoir, who seemed greatly distressed about the result of the combat, and who was now sitting—back to the party—with his face buried in his hands.

The athlete as yet had not moved a muscle. He felt sure he had happened upon a double mystery, by which he could profit beyond a doubt, and he understood perfectly that if he should allow the actors in this thrilling drama to depart he would lose the most important clew of all. On the other hand, he was by no means anxious to become mixed up in an affair which had resulted in a man's death.

The gendarmes or the forest guards might appear upon the scene of action at any moment, and the traveling artist intuitively dreaded any collision with the representatives of authority. The wisest course would certainly be to make his way back to the carriage; but it was a very difficult matter to get away without being seen, and yet it would be still worse to run a risk of being caught there in the very act of playing the spy.

More undecided than ever after this reflection, the athlete stroked his beard nervously, and even went so far as to glance questioningly at his subordinate, of whom he was not wont to ask advice.

Alcindor had not changed his position, and seemed to be still absorbed in profound calculations, for he had half closed his eyes and was mumbling over a lot of figures.

His master, becoming impatient, was about to give him a kick to arouse him from his arithmetical calculations, when the youth suddenly sprang to his feet as if moved by a spring, and ejaculated—

“Regina!”

The natural effect of this movement was to bring his startled face suddenly above the tangled mass of shrubbery and undergrowth, in which its possessor had lain concealed, and thus reveal it to the astonished gaze of the actors in this tragedy that had just been enacted in the clearing.

A strange creature, too, had suddenly appeared to view only a few steps from the group that had gathered round the dead body of M. de Saint Senier—so strange, indeed,

that at the first glance it was difficult to determine the sex of the fantastically dressed being whose scarlet robe contrasted vividly with the dark-green undergrowth from which it had just emerged.

The face of the apparition was as peculiar as its costume. A face crowned with jet-black hair, illumined with glittering eyes, and bronzed by the tropical sun, surmounted a long neck adorned with several coral necklaces. The slight, supple figure undulated under the folds of a short scarlet frock that reached only midway to her ankles, and her arms were bare and adorned with a number of tawdry bracelets.

This phantom, which certainly would not have been out of place in the fifth act of a fairy play, had walked so lightly that there had been no sound to warn those present of her approach, and it must have been that instinct which warns us of the presence of a person we can not see that aroused Alcindor from his mathematical calculations.

His master, compelled to show himself, though sorely against his will, stepped from his place of concealment, pale with surprise and anger, so the seconds perceived three strangers near them almost at the same instant.

Podensac, being constitutionally averse to anything like uncertainty, marched straight toward the intruders with the intention of subjecting them to a rather rude examination, but the athlete prudently decided to take the initiative.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen," he began, raising his hand to his forehead, and executing with his right leg the sort of *glissade* that forms the traditional salute of professional showmen, "I am a traveling artist, named Antoine Pilevert, at your service."

"What brought you here?" interrupted Taupier, who seemed greatly annoyed at this intrusion. "Instead of telling us your name, you had better explain what you are doing here?"

"Lost in the forest with my pupils. I was attracted

here by the sound of pistol shots; but I can see that this is an affair of honor, and being naturally discreet, you can count upon—”

“Your silence!” interrupted Podensac. “Yes, I feel sure of that; but this is not really the question just now. Have you a carriage?”

“A rude one, sir.”

“Then you can assist us in transporting—a wounded man to Saint Germain.”

“A wounded man or a dead man, as you please, general,” replied Pilevert, becoming more and more deferential in his manner.

“Well, one of our friends has just been dangerously wounded in a duel, and as it would take us a long time to procure a carriage, perhaps you will be kind enough to loan us yours:”

“With pleasure, general, as I said before,” replied Pilevert; “but you would do well to make haste, for the Prussians are rapidly approaching, and it would be a pity for us to be caught.”

“The Prussians? Nonsense! They haven’t reached Rheims yet.”

“Possibly; but I know that some Uhlans were seen near Pontoise yesterday. Ask my pupil if you do not believe me.”

Alcindor thus appealed to, resolved not to miss such an excellent opportunity to air his knowledge.

“It may be that the main body of the German army is still lingering in the Catalonian fields; but yesterday we heard of the near approach of the advance guard at Poissy, where we spent the night at the tavern of the *Sturgeon, acipenser fluvialis*.”

This response, by which Master Pilevert’s pupil proved himself to be at once a strategist, a naturalist, and a linguist, seemed to make a deep impression upon Podensac.

“Then there is all the more need for us to make haste,”

he said quickly. "Is your horse in condition to take us to Saint Germain in an hour?"

"Bradamante is not a rapid traveler, but she has a good deal of endurance; and I think we had better go straight to Paris, especially as I am called there by urgent business."

"But we should never get there."

"But we could easily get there by to-morrow, and then we should be out of the reach of the Prussians."

Podensac seemed undecided; but Taupier, who probably realized the necessity of settling the question immediately, undertook to do it by remarking—

"You must understand that Valnoir can not be allowed to remain here. I am going to get him away as soon as possible, for he seems completely overcome."

"I think no worse of him on that account," growled Podensac, "for though I spent five years in Mexico, where one becomes accustomed to almost anything, I must admit that the commander's death has moved me deeply."

"It has had no particular effect upon me," said Taupier. "Indeed, I feel quite capable—"

"It is evident that you have nothing resembling a heart in your organization," cried Podensac, deeply incensed at this display of indifference; "and I advise you to leave as soon as possible. I, with the aid of the lieutenant, will attend to taking the body back to Paris."

"Very well, I will go, then. I shall expect to meet you at the rooms of the Central Committee on Saturday. You know very well that your nomination can not be secured without my assistance. My paper is very generally read on the Rue Maubuée."

And turning on his heel, he walked away.

"Dog of a journalist!" muttered Podensac, "how quickly I would send you to the devil if I were not afraid of your innuendoes!"

The hunchback either did not hear the remark or he

pretended not to hear it, for he sauntered toward his friend Valroir, who had not moved since he became aware of his opponent's fate.

"Well, as the matter is settled, we had better lose no time," Podensac remarked to the athlete. "Fetch your vehicle; I will wait for you here. You," he added, turning to Alcindor, "had better stand guard in the road to prevent any one from disturbing us. As for the young girl, I hardly know what we shall do with her; but she can remain where she is for the present."

"She will not trouble you; she is deaf and dumb," remarked Pilevert.

"So much the better. I can't endure chatter-boxes."

The singular creature known as Regina had moved away as soon as Taupier began to take part in the conversation. One might have supposed that she shunned any contact with the deformed creature as good fairies shun the presence of evil geniuses.

She was certainly a young girl, and in spite of the strangeness of her costume and coiffure there was an indefinable charm about her. Her irregular features were irradiated by an expression of wonderful kindness, and her large black eyes sparkled with intelligence. She had just seated herself by the dead man's side, and taken one of his hands in hers. The young officer who was kneeling beside the body had not heard her step, which was as light as that of a bird, and he was now gazing at her in silent astonishment.

"In fact, women are always useful in an ambulance," muttered Podensac. "Go ahead, my men, I shall look for you in a quarter of an hour."

Alcindor obeyed without a word, but not without bestowing a melancholy glance on Regina. Pilevert, well satisfied with his morning's work, hastened back to the ravine.

There, by the most desperate efforts, they succeeded in righting the ponderous vehicle. Bradamante was reharnessed to it, and in about twenty minutes Pilevert drove his

vehicle triumphantly into the clearing, where Podensau was anxiously awaiting him.

Regina was still holding the dead man's hand.

Valnoir and his second had both disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

ON a sultry September evening, three days after the events related in the previous chapter, a beautiful woman was leaning over the balcony of one of the handsomest houses on the Place de la Madeleine, gazing down at the animated scene below.

To see the idle and noisy throng, one would never have suspected that Paris, which had been completely surrounded since the day before, was about to be cut off from the rest of the world for five long and dreary months.

The only thing that reminded one of the real situation of affairs was the thick dust which filled the entire air, and which was a peculiarity of the beginning of the siege.

Several large flocks of sheep, frightened by the moving vehicles, were rushing madly up the Boulevard Malesherbes, and the crowd watched them pass with laughing curiosity, gayly calculating the days of resistance that this live stock represented.

The lovely eyes of the lady upon the balcony gazed down at the crowd with the haughty disdain she thought due to persons who were obliged to go afoot. Occasionally, she glanced carelessly after some carriage in which she fancied she had recognized a familiar face, but turned away with an impatient movement on discovering that she had just honored with her attention a common hackney coach, laden with strangers.

Finally, weary of the scene, and annoyed by the curiosity which she seemed to inspire in the passers-by, she abruptly quitted the balcony, and stepped back into the drawing-room, exclaiming aloud—

protest. Valr. "These people are intolerable! What a fool I was to open in Paris!"

The fair speaker, who rejoiced in the euphonious name of Rose de Charmière, was a tall and beautiful woman. At least her beauty was unquestionable, if handsome eyes, a low, broad forehead, straight nose, and small mouth may be said to constitute beauty. Nature had made her a decided brunette, and the golden tint which Art had imparted to her hair, must have cost her more than one visit to an expert hair dyer, but her clear, colorless skin required none of the artificial aids to which so many ladies resort.

Her teeth were superb, her ears small, her feet slender and shapely, but her hands, in spite of the assiduous care lavished upon them, lacked distinction, as the *tout ensemble* lacked charm.

Her age was an unsolved problem, even to her most intimate friends. The unsophisticated thought her about twenty; keener observers supposed her to be about twenty-five; while some old frequenters of the turf, more deeply versed in such matters, bluntly declared that the fair Rose was considerably over thirty.

The young lady's mind chanced to be in an unusually perturbed state that day, in consequence of a long conversation that she had just held with the manager of her business affairs, but soon after her return to the drawing-room, her meditations upon the difficulty of placing loans at a heavy rate of interest were interrupted by the entrance of her maid.

"What is it, Fanfine?" inquired Rose, wearily.

"Monsieur Charles de Valnoir wishes to see, mademoiselle. Shall I tell him that mademoiselle is suffering with headache?" added the shrewd girl.

"No, show him in," replied Rose, in the resigned tone of an official obliged to grant a tiresome audience.

The maid disappeared, and a few moments afterward the

portière was again lifted to admit the survivor of the Saint Germain duel.

He was dressed in the height of fashion, as usual, but he was very pale.

"Is it you, Charles?" asked Mlle. de Charmière. "I didn't expect to see you before seven o'clock."

"This is, in fact, the hour at which all respectable people dine," replied Valnoir shortly, "and I am guilty of a great breach of good manners in calling too early."

There was a moment's silence, which Rose devoted to tranquilly lighting a cigarette.

"You have been really unendurable for the past three or four days," she remarked, at last. "Because you have fought a duel is no excuse for putting on such funereal airs."

"You forget that I had the misfortune to kill a man," retorted Valnoir, with suppressed vehemence.

"I really thought you had more sense," replied Mlle de Charmière, scornfully. "When one is of noble birth one doesn't attach such importance to a duel; one leaves such emotions to school-boys. Let us talk business. I like that theme much better."

"So be it," replied the young man, making a violent effort at self control. "The 'Serpenteau' has appeared, and seems likely to prove a great success."

"What is the 'Serpenteau'?"

"A paper I have started, as I have told you at least twenty times before."

As he spoke, he dashed his hat upon his head, and stepped hastily out upon the balcony.

"Are you too warm, my dear?" remarked Rose. "It is stifling here, and I think I will join you," she added, stepping to the window.

Her lover seemed to be absorbed in contemplating the front of the *Mademoiselle*, but he had turned very pale.

"What are you looking at?" she asked.

A lady, dressed in black, was slowly ascending the church steps, and Valnoir was watching her with feverish eyes.

"Ali, I understand," said Mlle. de Charmière, who had provided herself with an opera-glass. "You come here, it seems, to see the beautiful Renée de Saint Senier go to church."

"Go inside, go inside instantly!" cried Valnoir, seizing Rose almost roughly by the arm.

That young lady, being constitutionally averse to anything like a scene in public, allowed him to lead her unresistingly from the balcony, though secretly vowing that she would have her revenge. In her inmost heart she cared very little whether her lover looked at Mlle. de Saint Senier or not: she was determined to quarrel with him about it, merely for the principle of the thing.

"It is shameful!" she exclaimed in a tone which was the more vehement from the fact that Valnoir had really hurt her arm a little in his excitement. "I might have known that you were nothing but a country bumpkin."

And having launched this thunder-bolt, she threw herself down upon the sofa with a movement in which pettishness and coquetry were skillfully blended. "You have no heart," she murmured, now half sadly.

The fascination must have been very great for the young journalist to be deceived by this little comedy, but Circe has had many scholars, and Mlle. de Charmière had discovered the secret that changed Ulysses's companions into beasts.

"No heart!" she continued, sobbing now with a dramatic talent of no mean order, "no heart! And to think that I consented to endure the dangers and privations of a siege for the sake of a man who loves another! What you have just done has wounded me deeply. To come here merely to see your divinity pass, how dastardly!"

Valnoir turned pale and made a sudden movement as if with the intention of leaving the room, but Rose had

shaken all her magnificent golden hair loose by a pettish toss of her beautiful head, and the love-charm was already beginning to operate.

The slave resumed his chain before he had time to fly.

"You know perfectly well that I have never interchanged a word with Mademoiselle de Saint Senier," he replied, angrily; "besides—"

"What difference does that make?" interrupted Mlle. de Charmière. "One can worship one's idol at a distance. I was foolish enough to fall in love with you at the first representation of one of your plays, and Heaven knows it was stupid enough."

And Rose wept on, as she alone knew how to weep, without any hideous grimaces or contortions of the facial muscles, though at that very moment she was asking herself whether or not she had better sell her government bonds, and invest the proceeds in the Credit Foncier. But upon Valnoir, who was already wavering, this last burst of tears produced a decisive effect.

"Rose, my white Rose, what ails you?" he asked, pleadingly, "and what can I do to make you happy again?"

"Nothing, Charles, nothing," replied the enchantress, passing her fingers softly through her lover's hair.

"But, listen," continued Valnoir. "I know what you have sacrificed for me, and I do not intend that you shall ever regret it. I have not told you all. I have a surprise for you. I have found a charming house at Auteuil, and I think I shall soon be able to purchase it, and furnish it for our future home."

"You are mad, my dear Charles. Do you think that I would consent to blight the future of a talented man who has only his pen to depend upon?"

"The pen is going to be a gold one, my Rosalind," replied Valnoir, "for in less than a month the 'Serpenteau' will yield me an income of five hundred francs a day."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, my dearest, only Taupier declares that we must take a more liberal stand in politics."

"Your friend is right," answered Rose, gravely, after pausing a moment to make a pretense of drying her perfectly dry eyes. "The people must be defended."

"I did not know that your opinions were so advanced," said Valnoir, laughing.

"Ah, you do not know that I have suffered more than any child of the people," exclaimed Mlle. de Charmière, who had had time to assume an impassioned expression. "I, who, was the offspring of noble parents, but born in poverty. The founder of our house died in Palestine—"

Valnoir looked up and waited anxiously for what was to follow, but Rose prudently paused.

"Why will you not allow me to make some search for your relations?" asked Valnoir, after a short silence.

"What good would it do? My father squandered his property, and died in exile, and the only brother left me entered the Spanish army. Patents of nobility are of little value without fortune, and I am going to keep mine a secret until I become rich."

Valnoir, touched to the heart, was about to reply with effusion, when a slight sound made him turn his head.

The maid was standing beneath the folds of the raised *portière*.

"Some one desires to see mademoiselle," she announced.

"Who is it?" asked Rose, evidently much annoyed at the interruption.

"I don't know. The visitor is not a gentleman, I am sure."

"Not a gentleman? Then it must be some tradesman, I suppose?"

"No, madame, it is a man I never saw before, and the strangest looking creature!" added the maid, her sides shaking with laughter.

"Fanfine, my girl, I am in no mood for jesting," said her mistress, dryly.

"Mademoiselle will excuse me, I am sure, for if she could see him, she would laugh more than I do."

"See whom?" cried Mlle. de Charmière, impatiently.

"A long-legged creature with long hair, who talks Latin."

"You must be crazy. It is some beggar, probably, and you know I never encourage them. Send him away."

"Oh, no, mademoiselle, he is not a beggar. He even offered me a franc to usher him into the drawing-room, but you know very well, mademoiselle—"

"What is his name?"

"He didn't tell me, but he said that he was the bearer of a message from Monsieur Antoine Pilevert."

This name had very much the effect of a thunder-bolt upon Mlle. de Charmière.

"Pilevert!" she exclaimed, pale and trembling. "Impossible!"

"That was certainly the name."

"But this—this Pilevert is not with him?" inquired Mlle. de Charmière in very evident consternation.

"No, mademoiselle, he sent his groom, that is all," replied Fanfine, encouragingly, for she noticed her lady's evident embarrassment.

"If I am in your way, my dear, I will leave," remarked Valnoir, in a tone that Rose could not fail to understand.

At any other time, she would have responded in the same tone, but the late announcement seemed to have had a very softening effect upon the naturally arrogant nature of the beautiful Rose.

"You are very much mistaken, my friend," she said gently. "The strange name you just heard has reminded me of a very sad episode in my life which I shall perhaps relate to you, some day. I must see this stranger, but I beg you will remain, or rather wait for me in my boudoir."

And, without waiting for a reply, she opened the door and installed Valnoir in one of the arm-chairs in that charming retreat.

As soon as she had shut her lover up where she could call upon him for assistance if necessary, but where he could hear nothing by reason of the thickness of the hangings, she took the further precaution to slip the bolt between the two apartments. These preparations having also given her time to recover her self-possession, it was with a face as cold as a polar winter that she turned to Fanfine, and said—

“Show the man in.”

The door finally opened, but no one entered, or rather Mlle. de Charmière could see only the lower limbs of a tall person whose lofty head rose above the gilt rod from which the *portière* was suspended.

This entrance was certainly comical enough to upset the gravity of any one, but on serious occasions Rose could even deprive herself of the gratification of smiling, and by this time the silken folds that concealed the visitor had been parted, and the tall form of Alcindor had become visible.

The foreign artist had evidently sacrificed his rural tastes since his arrival in Paris, for the fantastic costume he wore in the forest of Saint Germain had undergone considerable modification.

His long attenuated limbs were lost in a pair of gorgeous striped trousers, and the rest of his form was enveloped in a long gray alpaca duster. He was twirling a *kepi* in his hands, but in spite of this warlike head-covering, no one would have mistaken him for a genuine member of the National Guard.

Rose read the social *status* of the new-comer at a glance.

“What do you want of me?” she asked haughtily, toying carelessly with a Turkish fan.

"I? Nothing," replied Alcindor, tranquilly swaying to and fro like a tall poplar upon a wind-swept plain.

"Then what brought you here?" asked the lady, with increasing disdain.

"There is a marked distinction to be made, madame," said Alcindor, placing a forefinger thoughtfully on his nose. "I, myself, want nothing, but my master does."

"And who is your master?"

"Monsieur Antoine Pilevert, as I have already told the young girl that attends to your door—in Latin, *puella*, in German, *madchen*, in Spanish—"

"Enough," cried Rose, unable to control her impatience. "I once knew a person of that name, but—"

"So my master was right. It seems that you do know him," interrupted Alcindor.

Rose de Charmière bit her lips. Here, at the very first, she had committed a blunder that must be repaired without delay, if possible.

"I tell you that you are mistaken," she said, though in a less arrogant tone; "for the person of whom I speak must have died a long time ago. What is my master's business?"

"He travels, madame," replied Alcindor, majestically.

"That is not a profession."

"It is his, however; and it is certainly the one best suited to an artist."

"He is an artist, then?"

"Yes, madame; a gymnast of the first order."

"Gymnast?" repeated Rose, frowning.

"Yes; it is a word derived from the Greek."

Mlle. de Charmière was not troubling herself much about etymologies just at that moment; but though she had no little trouble in hiding her dismay, she succeeded in assuming a tolerably indifferent air.

"There certainly must be some mistake, young man,"

she said, rising; "and I am sorry that you took the trouble to come here."

"I don't doubt it," remarked Alcindor, preparing to beat a retreat; "and I will say as much to my master."

"But who gave you my name and address?" inquired Mlle. de Charmière.

"No one, madame. It was Monsieur Pilevert who thought he recognized you and sent me up."

"Recognized me? And where did he see me, pray?"

"Out there on the balcony. He has been walking about the square for an hour or more."

Rose started as if stung by a serpent.

"But who did he tell you to ask for?" she asked, in a voice that trembled with emotion.

"It is hardly worth while to tell you," replied Alcindor, lifting the *portière*. "He was certainly mistaken, for you assuredly can not answer to the name he mentioned."

"I wish you would tell me, nevertheless," insisted Rose, trying to smile.

"He told me to see you myself; and that is why I insisted upon coming in, for I wanted to ask you if your name was not—"

"If my name was not what?" insisted Mlle. de Charmière, her eyes glittering with excitement.

"Catiche, madame," stammered the unfortunate Alcindor, not a little frightened.

There was a moment's silence. The lady had turned very pale.

"Your master is an impertinent man," she said at last, with an evident effort, "and I beg that you will go at once and tell him that I know no Mademoiselle Catiche."

"To hear is to obey," said the youth gravely, raising both hands to his forehead after the fashion of slaves in an Eastern seraglio.

He was about to open the door when the sound of a loud discussion reached them from the ante-chamber.

Fanfane's shrill voice was elevated to its highest pitch, but it could not drown a gruff voice that poured out a torrent of oaths, repeating again and again, however—

"It is she, I tell you; and I want to speak to her."

Mlle. de Charmière must have recognized the voice, for her emotion so overwhelmed her that she was obliged to clutch the back of a chair for support. Almost at the same instant the door was thrown violently open, and a man rushed into the room with all the impetuosity of a wild bull.

Pilevert, for it was he, was trembling with anger, and his eyes were flashing ominously.

Mlle. de Charmière was partially concealed by the folds of the *portière*, so he did not see her at first.

"So she will not see me!" he cried; "she says she doesn't know me. We'll see about that."

In the midst of this outburst of wrath, Rose de Charmière, whose self-possession had been restored by the very imminence of the danger, stepped forward and laid her hand gently on the athlete's arm.

"So here you are at last!" he yelled, turning upon her with a gesture that would have terrified any other woman.

But Mlle. de Charmière, who was an expert in the art of taming wild beasts, did not flinch.

"I think you'll hardly persist in saying that it isn't you any longer!" yelled Pilevert, shaking his fist threateningly in her face.

"Pardon me, monsieur, for having kept you waiting," said Rose, with perfect *sang-froid*. "I entertained so little hope of meeting you again in Paris that I thought there must be some mistake when this lad told me your name. I supposed you were in Spain."

"I have just returned from there, and from even more distant lands," growled the athlete, whose anger was already beginning to cool.

Mlle. de Charmière was looking him straight in the eyes

as a tamer looks at a lion, and did not lose one of his movements.

“As for my name,” added Pilevert, “it seems to me that you have good reasons for not forgetting that Madame—Madame—What name are you known by just now?”

Rose probably did not think it advisable to make any direct reply to this question, for turning to her maid, who seemed to be listening to this edifying conversation with the liveliest interest, she said curtly—

“Leave us; and remember that I am not at home to any one. I should like to have a long talk with you,” she added, turning to the gymnast, who seemed to be struck dumb by her assurance, “and do not intend that any one shall disturb us.”

“I—indeed—ah, well, that suits me. We certainly need no witnesses for what we have to say to each other; so you, Pierrot, can go and wait for me in the square below.”

“Very well, master,” replied Alcindor, suiting the action to the word.

The two principal actors in this family scene now found themselves alone.

They gazed at each other a moment without uttering a word, like two wrestlers who measure each other's strength before beginning the contest.

It was Mlle. de Charmière who first broke the silence.

“Sit down, Antoine,” she said in her sweetest voice.

The tone in which this invitation was uttered completely disarmed the athlete, who had evidently expected an entirely different mode of attack.

“It isn't worth while,” he growled, trying to revive the anger which was gradually evaporating under the influence of his companion's tender and persuasive accents. “We can talk just as well standing.”

The lady's only reply was to take possession of her visitor's brawny hand and compel him to seat himself beside her on the sofa.

"Now let us have a talk," said Rose, as tranquilly as if she had last seen her visitor only the evening before.

"Very well; let us have a talk. I certainly have been trying to find you long enough," retorted Pilevert.

But it was his last attempt at revolt.

"And so have I!" sighed Mlle. de Charmière. "For the last five years I have left no means untried to discover what had become of you."

"Bah!" exclaimed the athlete, only partially convinced.

"Would you like me to prove it?"

"I should not be sorry to have you do so; for, to tell the truth, I never suspected it."

"You left me in Bordeaux, did you not, with the intention of going to Spain?"

"I had received a splendid offer from the proprietor of a circus in Seville, but when I reached Andalusia I found that the manager had just failed, and I was obliged to enter another troupe that was about starting for San Francisco."

"And you neglected to write to me. Oh, I am not angry on account of your failure to do so; but what could I do? I was left alone, without friends or resources. I applied to the Spanish consul for information concerning you, but could obtain none. Would you like me to show you his letters?"

"It isn't worth while, as I have found you again; and you seem to have plenty of money. I sha'n't have to run about to fairs any more; and I am glad of it, for I certainly have had enough of that sort of life."

An expression of anger flitted over Rose's face, but it vanished in an instant, and the athlete did not even perceive it.

"I certainly hope that you are going to abandon that wretched profession," she replied quickly. "You may rest assured that I shall not allow my brother to follow it any longer if I can help it."

"It is certainly very kind in you to say that," exclaimed

Pilevert, really touched. "I always said that you were not as bad as you appeared."

This compliment did not seem to be at all to Mlle. de Charmière's taste, for she was unable to prevent a slight knitting of the brows.

"As that matter is settled," continued the gymnast, "I might as well come here to live at once. You are very nicely fixed here; and I shall find it much more comfortable than in my wagon. You can certainly find some place for me, my boy Alcindor, and my—"

Rose checked him with a gesture.

"Excuse me, my dear," she said, laying her hand on his brawny shoulder, "but you don't want to ruin me, do you?"

"I am not such a fool!" exclaimed the athlete, naïvely.

"Then you must understand that my situation will not allow me to give you a home here."

"And why, Catiche?" inquired the descendant of the Crusaders sulkily.

"Because I have a position to maintain, and because Catharine Pilevert's relatives would not be very graciously received by the friends of Mademoiselle de Charmière. I can not give you a home here, but I can assist you, and I am perfectly willing to do so upon one condition."

"And what is that?" inquired Pilevert, suspiciously.

"That you will also assist me."

"I assist you? Why, you know perfectly well that I haven't a penny."

"It isn't financial assistance that I need; but your shrewdness and intelligence."

"In that case you can certainly count upon me; and you have only to tell me what you want."

"You shall soon know; but I am first going to give you some money to clothe yourself respectably, and hire some rooms, for I shall want to see you often; and in that costume—"

"I can't say that I see anything much out of the way in my appearance," said Pilevert, glancing down complacently at his showy suit, and the massive plated watch-chain that dangled across his breast.

Rose smiled, and stepped to a little rosewood desk, from which she extracted a five hundred-franc bank-note.

The face of the athlete beamed with delight on beholding this token of sisterly affection.

"I declare, you are certainly a nice girl, Catiche," he exclaimed; "and I feel sure that we shall get along all right. This note will help me to start a little business affair I am contemplating."

"You have a scheme on hand?" asked Rose, suddenly becoming attentive.

"Yes, and a fine one."

"Can I be of any service to you?"

Pilevert stroked his beard, as was his habit when in doubt.

"Oh, if it is a secret, I have no desire to force myself into your confidence," added his sister, carelessly.

The athlete seemed in no haste to reply; but the veins around his temples, which stood out like whip-cords, showed that he was undergoing a violent mental struggle.

"Well, to tell the truth, my little Catiche," he said at last with an embarrassed air, "when I said that I had a scheme on hand, I didn't speak the exact truth. I think I am in possession of a valuable secret, that is all."

"A secret!" repeated Rose in astonishment.

"Yes. I know something that—well, one of those things for which people are willing to pay handsomely."

And again the athlete paused, as if afraid that he had said too much.

His sister did not take her eyes off his face. She was beginning to understand him, and also to comprehend the advantage she might perhaps derive from this revelation.

"Secrets of a certain kind always pay well, in Paris," she remarked carelessly.

"Yes; but the trouble is I don't know and can't find the persons interested in this."

"Are they in Paris?"

"Yes; but I haven't their address, or rather, I have lost it."

"Listen," said Rose, good-naturedly. "I have no desire to know your secret; but tell me the name of the person you want to find."

"I have, by the merest chance, made the acquaintance of a Monsieur de—"

He paused here, seized by a final misgiving.

"Monsieur de—what?" demanded Mlle. de Charmière, coldly.

"Well, do you know a Monsieur de Valnoir?"

"Valnoir! Did you say Valnoir?" cried Mlle. de Charmière.

"You know him, then? Good!" exclaimed Pilevert, delighted at this discovery. "If you can give me the address of that Parisian you will do me a great favor, and if the affair turns out well, I assure you, upon my word of honor as a gentleman, that you shall have a share in the profits."

"There must be some mistake," said Rose. "I am acquainted with a person of that name, but he is not in France now."

"But he is a relative, perhaps."

"I think not. What is the man's business?"

"I don't know exactly, but it seems to me that I heard he wrote for the papers."

"I am acquainted with none of those people, and I am afraid that your secret will not be worth much to you. Journalists are not wealthy, at least, not as a class."

"Perhaps not, but I shall be able to make this one pay handsomely. Ah! if those rascally Prussians had not been close upon our heels when I left Saint Germain, the affair would have been well under way before this. But they

won't always be here. Besides, I shall certainly find a way to get through their lines one of these days, and then—"

"Take care. You are going to tell me more than you wish to," interrupted Rose, smiling. "I know already that you met this Monsieur de Valnoir at Saint Germain, you sec."

The old *ruse* of asserting what one does not know in order to ascertain what one wishes to know proved successful, as usual.

"Oh, I've no desire to conceal the fact. I acted as his second in a duel there three days ago," replied Pilevert, boldly.

He had already said enough for Mlle. de Charmière to divine at least a part of the truth. The secret was evidently connected with her lover's visit to Saint Germain, and she was already acquainted with the sad result of this visit, though not with the details.

That her brother had acted as Valnoir's second, she did not believe for an instant; but she did feel sure that there was some mystery connected with the affair. Still, anxious as she was to solve it, she felt that it would not be prudent to insist too much; besides, she fully realized the necessity of terminating the interview as soon as possible. Valnoir might become tired of staying in the boudoir; besides, such close proximity was fraught with danger.

"Well, I will give you the address of a gentleman who can certainly be of great service to you in this matter," she remarked. "Call at the house of Monsieur Frapillon, No. 97 Rue Cadet, and tell him I sent you. You will find him there every day until noon. Tell him your story, and he will certainly find the person of whom you are in search."

"And he will also tell me all you say to him," added the prudent Rose, mentally.

"Yes, but how much will he charge me for doing it?" inquired Pilevert, who was naturally stingy.

"Nothing. I hire him by the year to attend to my

business, and he will make no extra charge for yours. Now, my dear Antoine, we must part. Call and see me again, as soon as you are suitably lodged and clothed. I shall have need of you, and if this enterprise of yours does not succeed, I have another to propose to you."

Pilevert would have been glad to prolong the conversation, but the five hundred-franc note had made him more amenable to reason than usual.

"You are right, Catiche," he said. "Alcindor must be getting tired of waiting for me; besides, it is time for my vermouth, and that hour you know is sacred. But I must kiss you before I go."

Mlle. de Charmière would gladly have dispensed with this mark of fraternal tenderness; but she resigned herself to it, in the hope of shortening the farewell; and she was awaiting the salute with upturned forehead and downcast eyes, when a slight sound made her turn her head.

Antoine did not have time to imprint a kiss upon her smooth brow, however, for his sister bounded from him like a panther.

A man had just entered the room and was advancing toward the sofa with an oblique and peculiar step.

"Fanfine," cried Mlle. de Charmière, in an irritated voice, "I told you, it seems to me, that I was at home to no one."

"Except me, as I am to dine with you to-day," remarked the new-comer.

"I had quite forgotten it—Monsieur Taupier—I believe," said Rose, in a tone that would have put any one except the deformed journalist to immediate flight.

"But I have not," replied that cynical personage, "for Valnoir tells me one dines remarkably well at your house."

The name Taupier had just uttered, produced very much the effect of a thunder-bolt. Rose, in the first moment of anger, had not realized all the possible consequences of this

unexpected intrusion, but she was now keenly alive to the imminence of the danger that had just arisen. On the other hand, the athlete had pricked up his ears on hearing Valnoir's name, and had risen to his feet more from curiosity than politeness.

"Why! it is the man we met in the forest of Saint Germain!" exclaimed the hunchback, recognizing him instantly.

The astonishment was mutual. Pilevert could hardly believe his eyes. He was beginning to understand that his sister had deceived him, and to wonder how he could get even with her. But it was at such critical moments as this that the clearness and decision of Mlle. de Charmière's judgment was most apparent.

"As you are already acquainted," she remarked tranquilly, "it is not necessary for me to introduce you to this gentleman who has called to bring me news of my brother."

As she spoke, an imperious glance at Pilevert warned him to be silent.

"The gentleman has just arrived from Spain," continued Rose, without removing her clear, cold eyes from the athlete's face.

"From Spain?" repeated Taupier. "It must have been by the way of Normandy, then, for he had just left Poissy when we met him in the forest of Saint Germain."

"Well, all roads lead to Rome, do they not?" retorted the athlete.

Even his dull intellect, under the spirited instruction of Mlle. de Charmière, had finally comprehended that circumstances made an offensive and defensive alliance necessary between him and his sister; at least, for the present.

"You are right, citizen," replied Taupier. "Your affairs do not concern me, though you were kind enough to interest yourself in ours. By the way, it must have been your boy that I met in the square below. I must say I like him. He has a way of standing apparently lost in thought

that indicates a fondness for social philosophy. What are his political opinions?"

"I never troubled myself to inquire," growled his master.

"What strange indifference!" exclaimed Taupier. "But you, my dear fellow-citizen, what do you, yourself, think of the future of modern society? I am almost certain that you are a positivist."

Then, seeing that the bewildered gymnast was utterly at a loss for a reply, the imperturbable journalist added—

"Oh, well, citizen, you are not obliged to answer me. We are not in a political club-room."

As he spoke, he installed himself comfortably in an arm-chair without waiting for any invitation.

For several minutes Mlle. de Charmière had been planning to release Valnoir, and above all to prepare him for an inevitable meeting, for now that Pilevert's suspicions were aroused, it was not at all likely that he would consent to depart without seeing the man of whom he was in search; and being ignorant of the fact that Taupier was in any way connected with her brother's secret, she saw no danger in leaving them alone together.

"You will excuse me for a moment, I am sure," she said, turning to the athlete. "I have some orders to give, but I trust that you will do me the favor to remain and take dinner with me and with two of my friends."

"I certainly shouldn't think of refusing if it were not for the fact that Alcindor must still be waiting for me in the square below," replied Pilevert, delighted at the prospect of securing a good meal free of cost.

"I will have him sent for," said Mlle. de Charmière graciously. Then, as she passed her brother on her way to the door, she whispered: "Remain. To-morrow I will explain all," and having murmured these words, intended to prevent any attempt at revolt, she disappeared with the lightness of a bird.

Taupier rubbed his hands, and prepared himself for a little bout with the athlete, for to harass and torment men who could crush him with a single blow of their fists was a favorite pastime with him; but he would have been less jubilant had he suspected that this brawny fellow had witnessed all his maneuvers in the clearing on the morning of the duel.

"Ah, well, my worthy friend," he began, swaying himself to and fro in his seat, after the fashion of a monkey, "how did you get on with your funeral the other day? Did you succeed in transporting the illustrious dead to the tomb of his ancestors?"

The athlete did not answer this heartless speech. He had drawn a small round object from his pocket, and seemed to be completely absorbed in the operation of twirling it slowly between his thumb and forefinger.

"So you practice even while you are in company," cried Taupier, jeeringly. "Is that a juggler's ball you have there?"

"No," answered Pilevert, looking him full in the face. "It is a bullet."

"A bullet," repeated Taupier, in the same mocking tone. "Oh, I see. We are in a state of siege, and patriots feel it their duty to play only with lead. But you are behind the times, old fellow. It is not conical in shape, and round balls have gone quite out of date now."

"It is a bullet, all the same," replied the athlete, continuing his occupation; "and I have an idea that it would have killed a man had it not been stopped on the way."

This time the allusion was too plain not to be understood.

Taupier gave a sudden start, so great was his surprise. Could it be that this man had seen him preparing the murder in which Valnoir had acted the part of an unconscious accomplice? It was a question that must be decided at once.

"You picked it up in the forest of Saint Germain, perhaps?" he remarked, with wonderful assurance.

"Possibly," replied Pilevert, coolly.

"And you perhaps intend to have it mounted in a ring as a present for your wife."

"No; I intend to sell it, if I can get my price for it," replied Pilevert, forgetting that his sister had recommended prudence.

"Money is much more of a rarity than lead in these days, however."

"It is sometimes found at the foot of giant oak-trees, nevertheless," retorted the athlete.

This time Valnoir's friend could not conceal a nervous contraction of the facial muscles.

"He saw the whole thing, and he is much shrewder than I supposed," he thought, rising to conceal his embarrassment.

In fact, his consternation was so great that he was endeavoring to devise some pretext for beating a retreat, when Mlle. de Charmière's return extricated him from his dilemma. The lady had been absent only a few moments, but even in that short time she had managed not only to change her dress, but to make her lover believe exactly what she wanted him to believe.

During her ten minutes' conversation with Valnoir, she had satisfied herself that her prisoner in the boudoir had not the slightest suspicion that he was at Pilevert's mercy, and a few caresses and a half dozen falsehoods had sufficed to convert him to the belief that the visitor was the bearer of a message to the noble Mlle. de Charmière from an exiled brother in Spain. She had even prevented any possibility of an unpleasant surprise by telling him that a strange chance had made this messenger an unseen witness of the duel at Saint Germain, and that their friend Taupier had just met and recognized him.

These statements being accepted with all the blind confi-

dence of a lover, it was not very difficult to persuade the journalist to dine in the company of the athlete and his pupil, so he followed his enchantress into the drawing-room, and there was not even the slightest trace of annoyance or embarrassment in the greeting he gave the strangers. Indeed, he even carried his condescension so far as to offer his hand to the athlete.

Taupier, unspeakably relieved by this diversion, began to breathe more freely, and to revolve in his mind sundry plans for the undoing of the dangerous enemy who had just given him such an unpleasant surprise.

The speedy entrance of Alcindor furnished another welcome diversion. This singular creature entered Mlle. de Charmière's gilded drawing-room with as much ease of manner as if he had trodden upon Aubusson carpets all his life.

His colorless face shone with serene satisfaction, and he saluted the company with a general bow that was utterly devoid of grace, though not of a certain majesty. The *savant* shone out so plainly, even from under this grotesque exterior, that Valnoir instantly saw a means of enlivening the dinner hour, and he made a sign to Taupier who understood his meaning perfectly, and who seized with joy upon an opportunity to overcome the difficulties of the situation.

"Madame is served!" announced Fanfine, and Mlle. de Charmière led the way to the table without any ceremony, to the great disappointment of Alcindor, who, to show his good manners, had already risen to offer his arm to his hostess.

The round table was laid in a room hung with Cordova leather, and adorned with sideboards loaded with handsome silver and rare china. The chairs were comfortable, the napery dazzling in whiteness, and beside each plate stood a little army of wine-glasses.

Rose placed Pilevert on her right, and Alcindor at her

left, and the first course was a silent one. Rose bestowed her attention almost exclusively upon her brother's messenger, and Valnoir being thus left to his own devices, finally set to work to draw out Alcindor.

"I am sure you must have literary aspirations, sir," he said to him point-blank.

"Oh, my dreams!" sighed Alcindor, tragically, helping himself to still another glass of wine, as he spoke.

"So here we have still another poet!" cried Taupier.

"Yes, but my dreams and illusions have fled, for I am twenty-six, and no one has yet understood or appreciated me," cried Alcindor, who was already beginning to feel the effect of the wine.

"Ah, well, here is an opportunity to make yourself understood, dear Monsieur Alcindor. Explain your theory, for a man with hair like yours always has a theory."

"You will have it so?" said Alcindor, in a tragic tone.

"Ah, well, so be it. I will again expose myself to the jibes of the world, for you are all worldlings, while I am only a poor follower of the Muses."

Urged on by an encouraging gesture from both the journalists, Alcindor resumed—

"I must begin by telling you the history of my life, for the history of my life is the history of my convictions."

"He talks well," remarked Taupier in a loud aside.

"Know, then, that I am of Grecian origin," continued the elated orator, "as my name, Alcindor Panaris, indicates; but I was born at Pontoise, where my parents gave me an excellent education. At the age of twenty I had been refused admission to the Naval School, the Polytechnic, the Normal School, and even to the Military School at Saint Cyr, to which I endeavored to gain entrance in spite of my abhorrence of standing armies."

"If you continue to relate your misfortunes, my dear Alcindor," interrupted Taupier, "you will certainly make

madame cry, and cast a gloom over the entire party. Explain your theory to us without further preamble."

"What for?" growled the orator, evidently incensed at the interruption.

"Why, so that we may be able to adopt it, oh, great misunderstood! Behold in us two wielders of the pen, who are still seeking the truth, and open new horizons to us."

"I am a fusionist!" said Alcindor, with much the same air with which a contemporary of Sylla would have said: "I am a Roman citizen."

"What religion is that?" inquired Valnoir, gravely.

"The religion of the future," exclaimed the youth, with an inspired air, pouring the remains of a bottle of Madeira into his champagne glass. "I advocate the fusion of everything—religions, opinions, nationalities—"

"And wines," added Rose, smiling.

"No more kings, no more wealth, no more wars. Let the man who produces consume, and the earth be covered with harvests that ripen upon the sites of demolished palaces."

"Musset says all this in two lines," interrupted Valnoir.—

"Et le globe rasé, sans barbe ni cheveux
Comme un grand potiron roulera dans les cieux."

"I see that you entirely fail to understand me," growled the fusionist. "Men of letters are the greatest enemies of the humanitarian philosophy. I shall exclude them from the society I intend to found."

"So you are anxious to found a society?" inquired Taupier.

"And may I venture to inquire the object of this society and the proposed means of establishing it?" added Valnoir, with the utmost gravity.

"I have just told you that the object is the fusion of everything; the means is the abolition of everything."

"Bravo! that's the talk. That suits me!" cried Taupier, clapping his hands enthusiastically. "Look here, Alcindor," he continued, with a sudden change of tone, "are you capable of addressing a political assembly?"

"In six languages, and upon any topic you may select," replied the philosopher of the future, unhesitatingly.

"And are you capable of writing a creditable article?"

"Ten a day, if you wish. Before making an engagement with my present employer, I was the sole editor of the 'Union,' a fusionist organ of which only eight numbers had appeared when it was suppressed."

"Young man, your future is in your own hands. Would you like to enter into an engagement with the editor of the 'Serpenteau'?"

"Yes, if that paper will advocate my principles," replied Alcindor with all the firmness of an apostle.

"Are you mad?" whispered Vulnoir, nudging the hunchback.

"Let me alone; I know what I am doing."

Mlle. de Charmière had listened to this conversation very attentively, though she was to all appearance busily engaged with a superb cluster of hot-house grapes, for the dessert had been placed upon the table.

"Now let us decide upon a name for our society," remarked the hunchback.

"That is needless. I have one, and I shall not change it," said Alcindor firmly.

"Let us hear the name," said Rose, smiling.

"The society shall be known as the 'Society of the Moon with the Teeth,'" announced the youth majestically.

"He is mad," muttered Vulnoir.

"Let the orator speak!" cried Taupier, who seemed to be deeply impressed by the eccentric youth's discourse. And he certainly had reason to be; for since Alcindor had given a free rein to his eloquence, he appeared positively transfigured. His large eyes seemed to be starting from

their sockets; his yellow hair waved over his slender shoulders, and his long arms beat the air wildly.

"Citizens," he began, with unruffled seriousness, "the name I think of giving to our society makes you smile. I know the unfortunate influence of the contemporary press. You are journalists, but journalists of a degenerate age, and you scoff at all you do not understand. To take the moon by the teeth is an expression that has been used from time immemorial to indicate the impossible. The impossible! I would expunge that obsolete word from the language of the future, for the emancipated proletariat will seize with the teeth the moon of universal happiness."

On hearing this bold figure of speech, Valnoir burst into a hearty laugh; and Rose could hardly restrain her inclination to do the same. Pilevert, reduced to silence by his last bottle of wine, was no longer able to defend his pupil. The hunchback was the only person who showed any enthusiasm.

"Yours is a great mind!" he cried, stretching out his arms as if to embrace the orator. "The 'Society of the Moon' with the Teeth is founded, and the 'Serpenteau' is its official organ."

"You have discovered a fine way to increase its circulation," sneered Valnoir, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Will you be kind enough to listen to me and answer me?" asked Taupier, in the firm tone of a man sure of his ground. "Do you or do you not believe in the power of words in this country?"

"I am paid for that. If I wrote like everybody else my paper would not find three hundred purchasers."

"Well, do you or do you not believe that mystery has a great fascination for the vulgar herd. Do you not know that with a few meaningless words and oaths upon poniards one can form an army of enthusiastic, even desperate, men, able of overturning any government under the sun?"

"That is a conceded fact, I believe."

"Very well. Then you will unite with us in founding the 'Moon with the Teeth,' will you not?"

"For what object, pray?"

"In order that you may be president of the republic in six months, simplicity!"

"Pardon me, but I desire neither president nor republic," interrupted Alcindor.

"Still, let me speak in my turn," continued the hunchback. "Our friend Valnoir has talent and readers, but he lacks the power to draw the masses. Alcindor possesses this power, but has no opportunity to exercise it. One supplies what the other lacks; their union will make a perfect and irresistible whole, and the 'Serpenteau' will cautiously promulgate the principles of a doctrine which will form an army for the election, and, if need be, for the barricades; and we will rule Paris while waiting until the time comes for us to govern the universe."

"Why not?" exclaimed Mlle. de Charmière, who had not lost a word of the hunchback's arguments.

And the question was accompanied with a glance well calculated to arouse the lurking demons of covetousness and ambition in Valnoir's breast. To Rose, in politics, as in love, nothing was impossible, and she saw a chance of personal aggrandizement through the great future that was in store for her lover.

"Why not?" she exclaimed, with an intoxicating glance at Valnoir. "To elevate one's self by serving the cause of suffering humanity is certainly a very laudable ambition."

"All that is absurd," retorted the editor-in-chief of the "Serpenteau." "How can you ask me to sustain in my paper theories which no one will understand; nor I, myself, for that matter."

"Oh, you needn't trouble your self, I'll attend to all that," replied the hunchback. "At all events, you will not try to prevent us from organizing our society, I am sure. Our plans are all made. The association will be"

subdivided into sections. There will be a board of directors, of which you can be a member if you choose; and we will have emblems and an initiation ceremony."

"Admirable! admirable!" exclaimed the delighted originator of the scheme.

"But how about the money?" inquired Valnoir, dryly.

"Each lover of the moon—for the members of the society will be known as lovers of the moon—will be assessed two sous a week; and we shall have millions of members before three months have elapsed."

"I have a treasurer to propose to you," added Mlle. de Charmière.

"Who is it?" inquired the hunchback, who would gladly have reserved that office for himself.

"Frapillon, my man of business," replied Rose, promptly. "He is prudence personified. He loves the people, and he is honest."

"And shrewd, into the bargain," murmured Valnoir, beginning to waver. "He manages my business, too; and if he thinks the plan feasible, I have no further objections to offer."

"But I have one," growled Pilevert, whom the guests had supposed engrossed in his struggle with Rhine wine.

"So you are listening, old Hercules," said Taupier, pausing to gaze admiringly at this veteran who was capable of listening to a conversation after emptying his seventh bottle.

"Yes, I am listening; but I don't understand you, and I want to know what you are plotting," replied Rose's brother, giving the table a violent blow with his clinched fist. "I care nothing about the moon, or the 'Serpenteau,' but you spoke of Frapillon just now, and I want Frapillon myself. I have some information to ask of him."

The wretch is drunk, and he is going to tell all he knows," thought Rose in sudden terror.

"Gentlemen," she said aloud, "coffee is awaiting us in

the drawing-room; and I have some excellent cigars to offer you."

"I want to see Frapillon, I tell you," continued Pilevert, with the obstinacy peculiar to drunken men.

"You shall see him—you shall see him at the office of the journal upon whose staff I offer you, too, a position, at a salary of ten francs a day," said the hunchback, soothingly.

"Ah, yes," murmured the athlete, "a position—with a salary of ten francs a day—and tobacco. But I don't want it. I have something better in view; besides, I can't leave Regina."

"And who is Regina, my gallant warrior? The savage beauty we met in the forest of Saint Germain?"

"Regina is my pupil," retorted Pilevert, "and the first who dares to say aught against her—"

"It is stifling here," remarked Valnoir, rising abruptly; and Mlle. de Charmière, thankful for the interruption, hastily followed his example and led the way to the drawing-room. Coffee had been prepared by the invaluable Fanfane; and the hunchback, who thoroughly appreciated this important adjunct to a good dinner, established himself near a small table covered with *liqueurs* and cordials. Alcindor and his master, too, were lured to the same spot by the gracious offer of a cup of smoking Mocha. Valnoir, alone, stepped out upon the balcony, in the hope of driving away the unpleasant memories evoked by the hunchback.

Darkness had gathered over the earth some time before, and the sky was glittering with stars. Mlle. de Charmière's lover had lighted a cigar, and was gazing down absently into the square below when a strange sight suddenly attracted his attention. In the corner of the square next to Mlle. de Charmière's house quite a large crowd had assembled, and a confused sound of jeers and laughter ascended to the balcony upon which Valnoir was standing; and though he could not understand the cause of the commotion, he could plainly distinguish a woman's form in the

center of the noisy throng. It seemed to him, too, that this woman was trying to force her way through the crowd; but in a moment she seated herself on a bench, and Valnoir, seeing her bury her face in her hands, very naturally concluded that she was weeping.

The heart of the editor-in-chief of the "Serpenteau" had not yet become invulnerable to feelings of pity; besides, the company of the two traveling artists was becoming distasteful to him, and he decided that he would go and ascertain the cause of the disturbance.

"Your cigars are execrable, my dear," he remarked to Rose, as he re-entered the drawing-room. "These brands are always worthless, and I am going out to purchase some."

At any other time Rose would have asked herself what caprice had prompted this move on the part of her lover, but just now she was having all she could do to watch her brother. She even felt the necessity of breaking up the party as soon as possible, so she replied—

"Do so, my dear, and if you should happen to see a barouche or a landau in the square, engage it, for I should like to take a drive through the Champs Elysées and get a breath of fresh air."

"Nothing would suit me better, for I have a frightful headache," answered Valnoir, picking up his hat.

When he reached the square, however, he found that he had troubled himself unnecessarily, for the crowd had dispersed, and on questioning a policeman who was standing near, he learned that a throng of loafers had gathered around a strangely dressed but inoffensive woman.

"I drove them away, and she just walked off in the direction of the Madeleine; but she'll be lucky if she escapes further annoyance in that fantastic costume," said the placid representative of municipal authority; and Valnoir, who took very little interest in these details, sauntered slowly on without thinking any more about the matter.

CHAPTER III.

THE evening was magnificent, and in the pale light of the stars the long colonnade of the Madeleine assumed colossal proportions.

A profound silence reigned around the building, and the chairs on the esplanade were empty. Valnoir walked slowly past it without meeting any one, but just as he turned the corner of the church, in order to make the tour of the square, he suddenly found himself face to face with a woman who was approaching from the opposite direction. The meeting was so unexpected that he nearly ran against her, and, on glancing up as he hastily recoiled, he could not repress an exclamation of surprise, for by the light of a neighboring street-lamp he recognized the young girl he had seen in the forest at Saint Germain.

But the glimpse he had of the strange creature was even more brief this time than in the forest, for she turned almost instantly and hastily retraced her steps. Still, she did not turn so quickly that Valnoir had not time to notice her strange costume, though it was now partially concealed by a long and dark cloak; but as she turned to flee, one end of the cloak flew back, revealing a short scarlet frock and a pair of bare arms, and satisfying the journalist beyond a doubt that this was the strange creature he had seen kneeling beside M. de Saint Senier's lifeless body.

Impelled by some vague instinct, Mlle. de Charmière's lover quickened his pace with the intention of following the young girl, but when he reached the corner of the square he perceived that she had already reached the terrace and was now hastening in the direction of the Rue Royale.

He followed the same route, taking care to keep some distance from the stranger, so as not to attract her atten-

tion. She seemed, however, to have entirely forgotten her meeting with Valnoir, for she did not turn to look behind her, but hastened toward the Place de la Concorde with a firm but rapid tread.

"It was certainly around her that the crowd gathered under Rose's window," thought Valnoir, "but what the dence could have taken her there?"

But the harder he endeavored to find a plausible answer to this question, the more hopeless the attempt appeared. The only sure means of satisfying himself on this point was to stop the young woman and ask an explanation; but Valnoir did not care to show himself until he became a little better acquainted with the object of this strange promenade.

He had just reached the corner of an alley, and the girl was only about twenty yards in advance of him, when a man leaped from behind a clump of shrubbery into the road, and a neighboring street-lamp lighted the spot sufficiently for Valnoir to catch the gleam of a musket, and see the scoundrel seize the young girl.

Valnoir was no coward, and though he might have hesitated to expose himself to danger for the sake of such a suspicious-looking stranger if he had had time for reflection, he yielded to his first impulse and saw only a pretty girl attacked by an outlaw.

"Beware, scoundrel!" he cried, running straight toward the man, and in another instant he was upon him and had seized him by the throat.

"Let me alone," yelled the wretch, dropping his gun.

With great presence of mind Valnoir picked up the weapon and aimed it at the man, shouting—

"Leave, or I'll blow your brains out!"

"But it is I who ought to tell you to leave," replied a voice husky with liquor.

The girl had taken advantage of her assailant's discomfiture to release herself from his hold, and was now leaning

against a tree for support. By this time Valnoir had discovered with whom he had to deal. The assailant was no other than a member of the National Guard, so grossly intoxicated as to be scarcely able to stand alone.

“Why did you molest this girl?” demanded Valnoir, secretly rejoiced to find himself in the presence of no more formidable enemy.

“I wasn’t molesting her. I was arresting her.”

“And what right have you to arrest her?”

“I have orders to arrest everybody, when I’m on guard. What is the use of having a revolution if a member of the 322d can’t take a woman to the station-house when he pleases?”

As he gave vent to this strange theory, the soldier seized the musket, and endeavored to wrest it from the grasp of Valnoir, who thought it high time to end the struggle. With a vigorous blow of his fist, he sent the defender of law and order reeling into the gutter, and then sprung to the young girl’s side. She had not yet entirely recovered from her fright; but she had strength to extend her hand to her deliverer, who led her to the quay, where he made her seat herself upon a bench. Here, placing his gun on the ground beside him, he drew from his pocket a bottle of smelling-salts, and was about to apply it to the young girl’s nostrils when she hastily sprung up and recoiled a step or two from him.

“What is the matter, mademoiselle?” inquired Valnoir, greatly astonished.

He tried to take her hand, but she repulsed him with a gesture expressive of both horror and loathing.

Mlle. de Charmière’s lover was not in the habit of inspiring such openly expressed aversion, and after the first moment of surprise he experienced a feeling of anger and annoyance which he could not entirely conceal.

“You have a strange way of thanking persons who render you a service,” he said, dryly. “Do you know I have

a great mind to surrender you to the tender mercies of that drunken fool who is yelling and cursing over there?"

The girl did not reply in words, but she threw back her head proudly, and gave him a look that said plainly: "Do it if you dare."

Touched with remorse, Valnoir immediately attempted to apologize for his rudeness.

"I did very wrong to speak to you in that way, mademoiselle," he said, gently. "I can see that I have wounded you, and I beg your pardon; but why do you treat me in this way?"

The anger that had blazed in the dark eyes a moment before died away, but that was all.

"I am not exactly a stranger to you," continued Valnoir. "I met you once before under very deplorable circumstances, and I know your name. You are called Regina."

The girl turned as if about to leave him.

"Why do you refuse to answer me?" insisted Valnoir, who did not understand the cause of this strange silence.

"I really believe she is dumb," muttered Valnoir, stepping toward her, but he had scarcely done so when the girl made an imperious gesture that said as plainly as any words: "Leave me," and then turned and walked away.

"This is becoming curious," muttered Valnoir, in astonishment, for though the athlete had mentioned the fact that his pupil was deaf and dumb to Podensac, neither the editor of the "Serpenteau" nor his friend Taupier had overheard the remark.

Resolved to solve the mystery, if possible, Valnoir hastened after Regina, and touching her lightly on the shoulder, said—

"But, Mademoiselle, I am not sure that you can hear me, voice by warn you that, in spite of your very evident desire to be rid of me, I am determined to see you safely home. I have no desire to offend you, but I can not leave you to

roam about these deserted quays alone at this hour of the night, so I shall accompany you until you reach a place of safety."

Regina had paused, and was now looking at him as if she was following the movements of his lips.

"I would also call your attention to the fact that if you desire to keep the object of your moonlight promenade a secret, you are making a great mistake. Wherever you attempt to go in this costume, especially in times like these, you are sure to be arrested, and whether you fall into the hands of a patrol or a policeman, your secret will be in imminent danger in either case."

The girl made a gesture that the would-be protector took for one of assent, and began to walk rapidly down the quay. Valnoir followed her closely, but she never once paused to speak or to glance behind her, and her movements were so rapid that Valnoir had considerable difficulty in keeping up with her.

The Quai de Billy and the Trocadero were already passed, at an ever increasing rate of speed, when Valnoir made one more attempt to soften the heart of the obdurate fair one.

"Regina, my dear child, pause, I entreat you," he said, earnestly. "This street is deserted, and it leads only to the city walls, the gates of which have been closed ever since the beginning of the siege. You are evidently trying to tire me out, but you will not succeed. Retrace your steps with me, and I promise you, upon my word of honor, to place you in the hands of your tutor, Pilevert."

Regina did not seem to hear him. Her features expressed only a sort of mental exaltation. One would have supposed her a somnambulist.

Passy was left behind them, then that portion of Auteuil that adjoins the Pont de Grenelle. In a few moments they would reach the Porte du Point du Jour.

A cold anger born of weariness, perhaps, as much as of

wounded pride, had taken possession of Valnoir's heart, and this was accompanied by a very natural aversion to being compelled to explain his singular escapade to the National Guards on duty on the ramparts.

"You seem resolved not to listen to me," he cried, angrily. "Very well, if you are determined to be arrested, I will arrest you myself."

As he spoke, he seized Regina almost roughly by the arm.

The young girl freed herself with a sudden bound, and ran with all her might into a narrow street or lane to the left.

Valnoir started in pursuit of her, but he was fatigued, and the fugitive reached the quay several seconds before he did. The colossal arches of the railway viaduct towered up in front of them, and the shore at this point was lined with boats of every shape and size.

"Good God! she is going to throw herself into the river!" cried Valnoir, seeing her spring upon one of these boats.

He followed her from craft to craft, and overtook her just as she reached the one furthest from the shore, but before he could seize her long flowing mantle Regina had sprung into the Seine.

Valnoir was so excited that he was on the point of jumping into the water after the fugitive; but an instant's reflection made him hesitate, and this hesitation lasted at least a minute.

Regina's leap into the water had made very little noise; besides, the quay seemed to be deserted, so he could not reasonably hope for any assistance in rescuing the girl. While engaged in these reflections, he thought he saw the body of the young girl reappear upon the surface of the water a few yards from the boat. Remorse seized him, and the idea of rowing to the aid of the drowning girl suddenly occurred to him, and he was about to untie the boat upon which he was standing when he discovered that this

had already been done. The shock produced by two persons leaping almost simultaneously into the frail cockle shell had broken the rope by which it was moored, and it was drifting slowly down the river.

"So much the better! I shall reach her all the sooner," thought Valnoir.

A quick glance had shown him a dark object still floating on the water.

It was not too late.

Unfortunately, upon feeling around in the bottom of the boat, he was unable to discover anything in the shape of an oar. Springing up hastily, he endeavored to seize some of the neighboring boats, but they were already too far away, for though the current is not strong near the shore, Valnoir's impetuous movements had already sent the light skiff well out into the stream.

The viaduct towered up threateningly before him, and he began to feel considerable anxiety in regard to the consequences of his adventure, for he had no means of directing the course of the boat which was drifting slowly but surely toward the center arch. He had some hope, however, of being able to seize one of the iron rings riveted to the piles, and he prepared to avail himself of this means of salvation. The bridge cast a long shadow on the Seine, and Regina's body was no longer visible, but supposing the poor girl was drowned, Valnoir was now engrossed entirely by plans for his own preservation.

The nearer the boat approached the viaduct, the stronger the current became, and the skiff was swept swiftly on toward the central arch. As he neared it, Valnoir steadied himself by holding on to the gunwale with one hand, while with the other he tried to discover some ring imbedded in the masonry, but the rings were either much higher or much lower, for they escaped him.

In a few seconds the arch was safely traversed, and Valnoir, exhausted by his fruitless efforts, was about to throw

himself down in the bottom of the boat, when he perceived a black mass that apparently obstructed the river a little further on, and his hopes revived on recollecting that several rows of piles had recently been placed across the river to prevent any nautical attempts on the part of the Prussians.

But he had forgotten some of the necessities of defense. To facilitate the movements of the gun-boats and floating batteries an opening had been left in the middle of the barrier, and unfortunately the boat was drifting straight toward that opening. If its occupant had had a pole of any kind in his possession, he would have had some chance of arresting the progress of his skiff, but even the rudder had been removed from it.

Just as he was passing through the opening, he experienced no little emotion on perceiving a dark object floating upon the water close by the boat, and on seizing it, he found that it was Regina's mantle.

He recognized it instantly, and threw it down into the bottom of the boat, supposing that this was the last remaining vestige of the young girl. He did not even ask himself what could have become of the body, for his own peril was too great to allow him much opportunity for reflection, especially as the current was bearing him slowly but surely toward much more serious danger, for he had already passed the outer line of fortifications, and the Prussians having intrenched themselves on the left bank of the Seine, it was by no means improbable that he would soon find himself between two fires. He was even surprised that he had traversed the space between the viaduct and the fortifications without accident.

The sharp whistle of a bullet rushing through the air aroused him from these reflections, and the ball struck the water a few yards from the boat. He had been fired at from the bastion of the Point du Jour, which he had just passed.

Valnoir was a brave man in the ordinary sense of the word, that is to say, he would not have refused to fight with any person who insulted him, but he had not sufficient control of his nerves not to dodge a bullet when no one was looking at him.

The idea of calling out to them that he was a Frenchman occurred to him, but he was not sure that he would be able to make himself understood, and his cries might bring down a general discharge of musketry upon him, so he finally decided that he had better allow himself to drift on a little further, and trust to luck.

Unfortunately, the shot from the bastion had aroused the sharp-shooters stationed along the banks, and a brisk fusillade began.

The peril was not immediate, for the firing seemed to be a little further down the river, but in a few moments the boat would find itself in a very dangerous position.

Valnoir was sitting in the stern, gazing anxiously around him, when he fancied he distinguished to the right, a short distance ahead of him, a swimmer who seemed to be trying to reach the French lines.

This time he could restrain himself no longer, but cried, "Help, help!" with all his might.

But either because these cries were not heard, or because he had his reasons for not heeding the entreaty, the swimmer, instead of pausing, hastened his movements, and soon disappeared among the willows that edged the bank.

Valnoir would gladly have done the same, but he had neglected the art of natation, and was unable to swim six strokes.

He had abundant cause to regret his call for aid, for three or four shots were fired almost simultaneously from the left shore, and a faint splash told him that the balls had struck the water in front of the boat.

He now bitterly deplored the idle curiosity that had first impelled him to follow Regina, and he would willingly

have given up all right and title to the "Serpenteau" to see the boat deviate to the right. But he fancied, on the contrary, that it was moving in the opposite direction, and that its progress was much less rapid.

Valnoir was endeavoring to ascertain the cause of this phenomenon, when he suddenly became aware of a new danger.

The boat was leaking rapidly; in fact it was already beginning to sink. It was constructed of very thin planks, and as the water was rushing in from somewhere in the bow, there could be little doubt that one of the shots fired a few moments before had struck the frail craft, and the leak must be stopped at once unless he had abandoned all hope of escape from death.

Regina's cloak was the only thing at his disposal, and he tried to stop the leak with that; but this only served to retard the progress of the water. He tried, too, to bale the water out with his hat, and even with his hands, but he was obliged to abandon that attempt, for the boat had again become a target for the Prussian sharp-shooters, and the bullets were beginning to whistle so briskly that Valnoir thought it advisable to crouch down in the bottom of the boat.

It was one of those situations in which even the most sanguine must give way to despair; and Mlle. de Charmière's admirer gave himself up for lost.

"To die of drowning in this old boat, like a rat in a trap!" he muttered savagely. "What a fate!"

Then the thought that his body might be found and taken to the morgue made his blood curdle in his veins.

It occurred to him, too, that the editors of rival papers would be sure to say that the editor of the "Serpenteau" had perished while carrying information to the Prussians.

"Taupier will not be sorry to take my place," he thought, bitterly.

Anger restored a portion of his wonted energy.

It would be better to be captured by the Prussians than to lie at the bottom of the Seine, so he again resolved to call for aid at the risk of receiving yet another volley in response.

"They will not understand me, perhaps," he said to himself, "but they may think I am a spy bringing them news. They will come, and I shall be saved."

He had noticed, moreover, that there had been no firing from the French shore at this point, and that the place seemed deserted, while a little further down the river a brisk fusillade was still going on.

"Now is the time!" thought Valnoir, and he began to call out at the top of his voice—

"Save me! friends, save me!"

He took the precaution, however, to stretch himself out upon one of the seats in order to insure his safety in case the Prussians should take it into their heads to treat him to another volley.

This time the enemy seemed to be less blood-thirsty. They did not fire, and Valnoir could distinctly hear them laughing and talking behind the trees that lined the shore. He could not understand what they were saying, but his instinct soon warned him that they were laughing at his distress, and that they were going to allow him to perish.

The boat was nearly full of water now, and might sink at any moment under the weight of its occupant and of the water that was gradually filling it; but by lightening its burden it might still be kept afloat some time, and Valnoir, though unable to swim across the river, felt quite sure that he would be able to keep himself afloat in the water if he had something to cling to. A new plan suddenly flashed through his mind, and he instantly set to work to carry it into execution.

He began by rolling Regina's mantle into a sort of rope, one end of which he tied about the gunwale, while out of the other end he made a sort of belt that he fastened around

his waist; then, by springing hastily to his feet, he made the boat rock violently for an instant and then overturn, a maneuver which had the twofold advantage of emptying the boat, which now floated tranquilly along keel uppermost, and of making the Prussians believe that all was over.

When Valnoir rose to the surface he found that he had only to place his left hand on the floating boat and to move his right arm and limbs gently to keep himself from drowning, though it was evident from the shouts of laughter that followed his plunge into the river that the Prussians believed the Frenchman was really and truly drowned.

Valnoir's eyes, like his hopes, were now fixed upon the French shore which was not as deserted as it appeared to be, perhaps, for more than once he fancied that he had noticed a slight movement among the rushes on the river bank; besides, two or three hundred yards below the Seine described a curve, and upon this point a light gleamed at intervals through the trees.

"Our outposts must be stationed there," thought Valnoir, "if I can reach them I am saved."

And he tried to gently drag the boat toward the shore where salvation lay.

But he soon perceived that his limbs were becoming stiff, and that he would have to struggle with a new and dangerous enemy—the cold.

It was the beginning of autumn, and the temperature of the water was not intolerable, but on throwing himself into the river after a long and rapid walk, Valnoir had experienced a shock whose consequences were beginning to make themselves felt.

"If I don't reach land in a quarter of an hour I am lost!" he said to himself.

At his present rate of progress this was about the time that he would require to reach the promontory where he hoped to find the French outposts.

So there was still a chance for Valnoir, when he ex-

perienced a violent jerk. The boat had been suddenly checked in its course. The mantle that united him to the skiff had caught around a pile planted almost in the middle of the river, and the natural effect of this was to separate Valnoir from the boat. He was dragged around to one side of the obstacle, while the boat floated round to the other side, and he found himself held a prisoner by the rope he himself had made.

By one supreme effort he succeeded in pulling himself hand over hand to the pile by means of the mantle, and in seizing the top of it, which projected a little way above the surface of the water, but the task was not an easy one, and it exhausted him greatly.

As he clung to the swaying log the unfortunate man felt the chilliness that had benumbed his limbs gradually ascending to his heart.

Soon his thoughts became confused, and he experienced sensations heretofore unknown to him.

Flashes of memory traversed his brain, suddenly illuminating some forgotten scene of his childhood or infancy—those happy days before he had become the slave of the “Serpenteau,” or made the acquaintance of Mlle. de Charmière.

Then the sensation of intolerable physical suffering returned, followed by moments in which his body seemed to diminish in size, and a profound torpor stole over him.

He realized then that death was near, and closed his eyes.

He had lost consciousness almost entirely now, but his hands still clutched the pile with the convulsive energy which the near approach of death imparts to a drowning man.

He was aroused by a sharp pain. He had slipped a little, and a large nail in the pile was tearing his flesh.

Upon opening his eyes he also perceived that the boat had become detached from the mantle, and was now float-

ing gently down the stream; but one end of the cloak was still knotted around his waist, the other was floating on the surface of the water.

He could still hear the voices of the Prussians. They had ceased firing, and from that fact Valnoir concluded that they had lost sight of him, but he also felt that his strength would soon fail him utterly.

His sufferings, too, had become intolerable. Before unclasping his arms and allowing himself to sink into the cold embrace of the pitiless river he cast one more despairing glance at the right shore.

There lay France—there lay salvation; and the unfortunate man said to himself that he was about to die on account of his inability to swim perhaps five minutes.

By one of those strange mental processes that occur in supreme moments, the pale face of the expiring Saint Senier suddenly appeared before him as in a dream.

Valnoir, though carefully reared by a simple-minded and devout mother, had long since forgotten the faith of his childhood, but there still clung to him a vague belief in the just reward or punishment of some human acts even in this world.

“I have killed a fellow-man, and it is only right that I myself should die,” he thought.

And he cast one more long glance around him as if bidding a final adieu to life.

A light westerly wind had risen, and clouds now concealed the stars from sight. The Seine had assumed a leaden hue, and the silence was broken only by the cannon of Mount Valerien, which thundered forth their defiance only at long intervals.

The quiet was so profound that a very faint and distant sound proceeding from the right bank of the river was distinctly heard by Valnoir, whose senses had acquired that singular acuteness which overexcited nerves imparts.

He made one more effort to lift himself above the surface

of the water, and gazed eagerly at the place from which he fancied he had heard a faint splash.

A tiny black speck, so small as to be scarcely visible, had appeared upon the gray surface of the water. Valnoir's heart sunk like lead at the thought that some one was at last coming to his aid only to arrive too late.

But the black speck was coming nearer, and he could distinctly hear a faint but measured sound.

One minute more, and he might perhaps escape a frightful death.

But a terrible cramp contracted his muscles, and though his nails were buried in the post, his hands could no longer support his weight.

"Hold fast!" said the suppressed voice of the swimmer, who was now making his way through the water with marvellous rapidity.

Valnoir tried to hold on with his teeth, but this attempt also proved a failure; his fingers relaxed their hold, and he was about to sink, when a strong arm seized him by the shoulder and kept his head above water.

"Rest a moment and lean upon me," said the man who had appeared so opportunely; and Valnoir threw his arms around his preserver's neck and clung to him with all the energy of despair.

"Don't do that, you are choking me," continued the voice. "Just place your hands on my shoulder, and I will save you."

But Valnoir did not seem to hear him; and to free himself from the dangerous embrace the stranger was obliged to give him a violent push.

Valnoir let go his hold, and sunk, beating the water wildly with both arms. He would certainly have been drowned if the stranger had not promptly seized him and restored him to an upright position as soon as he rose to the surface.

He then began to regain a little of his self-possession; his

eyes opened, his oppressed chest filled with air, and he heaved a long sigh of relief.

"Now stretch yourself out in the water as I told you, and let me do the rest," said the stranger. "But be quick. We have no time to lose. I fear we have been seen already."

This was only too true, unfortunately. The sound of the brief struggle had attracted the attention of the Prussians, and a shot was fired from the opposite bank. The bullet struck the water about ten feet from the pile.

"They are aiming badly; but we had better make haste," remarked the stranger, tranquilly, and this time Valnoir did not compel him to repeat the invitation.

As nearly as he could judge in the darkness, his preserver was a young man; and he had not taken time to undress before throwing himself into the Seine, for his shoulders, at least, were covered with a woollen garment. Valnoir could not distinguish the stranger's features, but his voice seemed familiar, and he tried to recall the circumstances under which he had previously heard it, but his mind was too confused.

Besides, the situation was by no means reassuring, for the Prussian sharpshooters, aroused by their comrades' rifles, returned to their hiding-places among the willows, and now opened a brisk fire upon the fugitives.

The night was too dark for them to aim with much precision, but the frequent passage of a rifle ball warned Valnoir that his life still hung upon a thread.

"Courage, we are nearing the shore," remarked the intrepid swimmer occasionally.

The outline of the right bank of the river was indeed becoming distinctly visible, and Valnoir even fancied that he could already discern human forms moving about among the trees.

A sharp whistle, the sharpest and shortest he had yet heard, interrupted these reflections. A ball had just passed

close to his head, and he thought that the swimmer, too, had given a sudden start.

"Are you wounded, sir?" he inquired with a solicitude which was the more sincere from the fact that his own life depended upon that of his preserver.

"Oh, it's nothing," replied the stranger, striking out vigorously for the shore with his right arm.

Only a few more strokes were required to bring him to the bank, and he reached it without much apparent difficulty.

"Now give it to them, boys," he cried, as he scrambled out of the water.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a brisk volley was fired, and probably not without effect, for a cry of mingled rage and pain resounded from the Prussian shore.

When Valnoir found himself safe on land the artificial energy that had previously sustained him suddenly gave way. A mist obscured his vision; his limbs trembled, and he staggered like a drunken man.

"Help him up to the Red House, boys, as soon as you can," said his preserver to some soldiers who had stepped forward to meet them.

"But how about yourself, lieutenant?" replied one of the men. "I hope the rascals didn't hit you."

"Yes, in the shoulder; but the wound is so slight that I shall not require a surgeon. You can dress it yourself, my old Landreau."

The officer followed the little party to a house not more than twenty yards distant, though it was not visible from the shore.

Valnoir was naturally the first to enter a large hall in which a bright fire was blazing on the hearth, and being anxious to dry himself, he hastened to the fire-place and turned his back to the flame. This movement brought him face to face with the officer, who drew back in surprise.

The rescuer and the rescued had recognized each other. Valnoir was in the presence of one of the participants in the duel at Saint Germain, Lieutenant Roger de Saint Senier.

To owe his life to a man who had good reason to hate him with a mortal hatred was a surprise for which the journalist was utterly unprepared, and so far as his own self-love was concerned he certainly would have preferred to fall into the hands of the Prussians.

The astonishment of the officer was no less profound, and his countenance instantly assumed an expression of haughty repugnance that wounded the journalist keenly.

M. de Saint Senier was tall, slender and fair; his regular features were characterized by an almost effeminate delicacy and gentleness, and his budding mustache indicated that he was not more than twenty-three years of age at most; but his clear blue eyes imparted a remarkable expression of courage and audacity to his youthful face.

The lieutenant was attired in blue trousers with red stripes and a white flannel shirt. Before jumping into the river, he had torn off his coat, but he had not even taken time to remove the long boots that reached nearly to his knees.

He was standing only a few feet from Valnoir, who was a striking contrast to his preserver in appearance. The editor-in-chief of the "Serpenteau" was of medium height and very dark-complexioned, and the furrows on his rather angular and haggard face indicated passion rather than energy. One would have supposed him at least ten years older than M. Saint Senier, though in reality he was not yet thirty.

To a close observer these two men represented two entirely different types which the chances of war often bring together—one the son of an influential and wealthy family, reared in the country amid surroundings that discipline the mind and strengthen the character; the other, the lad

thrown immediately upon leaving college into the feverish life of a great city where illusions are speedily exchanged for *rices*.

They eyed each other as men of rival classes always eye each other on their first meeting, and their instinctive distrust and dislike were apparent in the very glances they interchanged; but Valnoir was at a decided disadvantage in this silent struggle, for he could not forget that M. de Saint Senier had just rescued him from certain death, and it devolved upon him to break the icy silence that had followed the moment of recognition. Valnoir endeavored, accordingly, to find some suitable words of gratitude to address to his preserver, but had considerable difficulty in finding them.

The intervention of a subordinate extricated him from his embarrassing position.

"Let me look at your wound, lieutenant," said one of the soldiers, approaching M. de Saint Senier.

The man who thus offered his services wore the uniform of the National Guards, but he had long since passed the age of compulsory service, either in the militia or in the army.

Short, and thin, though the possessor of broad shoulders and a well-developed chest, this old soldier had a long face with a broad nose, and a stiff gray mustache, while his bronzed skin indicated that his life had been spent in the open air, and his small brown eyes sparkled with animation and intelligence.

"Ah, Monsieur Roger," he remarked, as he cut open the blood-stained sleeve that covered the lieutenant's left arm, "I told you that it was folly to go and make yourself a target for those rascally Prussians, to say nothing of the danger of contracting lung fever. And to run such a risk—"

"It's a mere scratch, I assure you, my brave Landreau," replied the officer.

"It is true that the bullet did not carry away much flesh with it," said the old soldier, who was now examining the wound with the eye of a connoisseur; "but even that little is too much. You will have plenty of opportunities to encounter bullets on land, without going to the middle of the river in search of them. Ah! it was a lucky thing that I enlisted in your company. The poachers at Saint Senier will perhaps kill a few more partridges now I am not there to catch them, but I can at least watch over you, and Mademoiselle Renée will say that I did right to melt my gamekeeper's badge into bullets."

On hearing this name of Renée, which awakened such remorse in his heart, Valnoir could not repress a nervous start, and the lieutenant frowned slightly.

"Mademoiselle will certainly be much grieved to hear of this," continued Landreau, as he proceeded with the task of bandaging the wound. "If you should be killed, what would become of mademoiselle now she hasn't my poor master left to protect her. Ah! if I had been present at that accursed duel, the villain who shot him would not have returned to Paris alive. I would have killed him like a dog."

Valnoir turned pale, and repressed the words that were already upon his lips, for this did not seem to be a suitable moment to thank his preserver.

"I shall have no further need of you now," remarked M. de Saint Senier, when the dressing of the wound was concluded. "I am going to remain here in the chimney-corner with this gentleman, who must want to warm himself, so return to the bank of the river, with your comrades, and see that the men do not expose themselves unnecessarily."

"If they do they will only be following their commander's example," growled the incorrigible old servant. "But if you should need me, Monsieur Roger, you must remember that I am not far off," he added, casting an unfriendly glance at Valnoir.

"Have no fears. If I need you I'll whistle twice."

After receiving this assurance, Landreau concluded to leave the house with the other soldiers, and Valnoir and the young officer found themselves alone together. The editor-in-chief of the "Serpenteau" had had time to prepare himself, however; so without any further delay, he said warmly:

"I owe my life to you, sir, and I am glad to owe it to you. My failure to thank you more promptly was due entirely to the fact that I did not like to make any allusion in the presence of your soldiers to the deplorable circumstances attending our former meeting. But now we are alone, you must allow me to express not only my profound gratitude, but the sincere grief the result of that unfortunate duel has caused me."

"That is entirely unnecessary, sir," interrupted the officer. "I can accept neither the thanks you offer, nor the sympathy you express, but I must remind you that you, too, are under obligations to fight with me."

"With you, sir! with you, who have just saved my life."

"I made this same demand in the forest of Saint Germain a few moments before the duel," replied M. de Saint Senier, coldly, "and you know the circumstances that alone prevented a second hostile meeting. I was unable to fight with you on account of the arrival of the Prussians, which compelled us to make immediate use of the vehicle chance placed in our path."

"I recollect perfectly all that occurred," said the journalist, quickly; "but I have not seen Podensac since, so I am still ignorant how the sad journey ended, and I should like to ask—"

"Will you be kind enough to tell me when and where I can meet you?" inquired the officer, without paying the slightest attention to Valnoir's question.

That gentleman was not prepared for the turn affairs had taken, but he said firmly, though sadly;

"I have reasons which any man of feeling will understand for refusing to fight with you; besides, I have never wronged or insulted you personally."

"You have insulted the name I bear," said the officer, gravely.

"In the heat of a political controversy I indulged in language that I now bitterly regret," replied Valnoir.

M. de Saint Senier attempted to silence him with a gesture which was almost insulting in its indifference, but the editor-in-chief persisted in his efforts to secure a hearing.

"I assure you, sir," he continued, "that I should never have consented to that fatal duel if I had the honor of a personal acquaintance with you, or your relatives."

"So you absolutely refuse to fight?" demanded the lieutenant.

Valnoir tried to frame an evasive reply, but he had not time.

M. de Saint Senier had suddenly sprung to his feet. His face was colorless, and his eyes fairly blazed with anger as he pointed to Regina's mantle, which was lying on the table where Valnoir had thrown it on his entrance.

The latter understood, and turned pale in his turn.

The mantle was of some heavy Oriental stuff that must have been purchased originally in some bazaar at Smyrna or Cairo, and the garment was adorned with two heavily wrought gold clasps that rendered it easily recognizable.

"Where did you get that cloak, sir?" he demanded in a voice that trembled with anger.

"Explain! Vindicate yourself, if you can!" added the lieutenant, still more threateningly.

"Vindicate myself! Of what crime am I accused, if you please?" asked Valnoir, merely to gain time.

M. de Saint Senier's anger was the cold anger of the native of the north, and the journalist's question promptly restored his self-possession.

"You are right, sir," he said, reseating himself. "It

is my duty to explain my meaning clearly, and I advise you, for your own sake, to answer me in the same way. I was on guard just now, on the bank of the Seine, when I heard a cry for aid, in French. My men tried to prevent me from endangering my life in order to rescue a drowning man, but I could not abandon a fellow-countryman, so I plunged into the water and succeeded in saving you from the twofold peril that threatened you."

"I am not unmindful of the service you rendered me," exclaimed Valnoir warmly, "and I am ready to prove my gratitude."

"Will you have the goodness not to interrupt me, but to listen to me until the end," replied M. de Saint Senier, coldly. "I know nothing about this man I just saved," continued the lieutenant. "He was very possibly a deserter and a spy—"

Valnoir made a gesture of indignant denial.

"I said 'possibly,'" continued the officer, coldly. "I should have said 'probably,' for who but a deserter or a spy would attempt to cross the Seine at night, opposite a Prussian outpost. I certainly have no reason to conceal the fact that I intended to question you closely after your rescue; but when I recognized you in the fire-light just now, I could see in you, and I shall henceforth see in you only the mortal enemy of all who bear my name, and my first impulse was to avenge our family honor before doing my duty as a soldier. It suits me now," he continued haughtily, "to recollect that I am on duty at the outposts, and to demand an account of your proceedings this night."

Valnoir had had time to prepare his defense.

"As you please, sir," he said in the injured tone of a man who is unjustly accused.

"Whence did you come?" inquired the lieutenant.

"From Paris."

"The gates are closed at seven o'clock, how could you have left the city?"

"I left the city in a boat."

"And you were able to pass the closely watched barrier that has been placed across the river."

"Yes. I was fired at from the bastion, but they didn't hit me."

"Where were you going?"

"Nowhere in particular."

"I warn you that if you refuse to explain, I shall certainly send you to the commandant, who will doubtless find a way to make you speak."

"I have told you the truth," replied Valnoir, no whit disconcerted. "I did not know where I was going, for I had no means of steering the boat I was in."

"You seem inclined to jest, sir, and I have no time to waste. Why did you get into the boat?"

"To save a person's life—in fact, a woman's life."

The blow had told, for M. de Saint Senier could not conceal his emotion.

"And this cloak?" he asked, in an agitated voice.

"Belonged to her. I saw it floating on the water and picked it up in the hope of being able to discover from it the name of the poor victim of despair."

The lieutenant buried his face in his hands.

"As you seem to have no intention of questioning me further, sir," Valnoir said, with admirably feigned dignity, "I am ready to tell you all the details of this sad story. I was alone on the Quai d'Auteuil, whither I had gone to pay a visit to a friend, when a woman rushed past me. She was making straight for the river, and her frantic air aroused in my mind a suspicion that she was about to commit suicide. I followed her, and found that I had guessed only too correctly. She had no sooner reached the bank of the river than she plunged headlong into the Seine, and unfortunately I was a moment too late."

"Is it possible that you made no attempt to save her?"

"On the contrary, it was the attempt to save her that so

nearly cost me my life just now," replied Valnoir, quietly. "I do not know how to swim, as you must be aware, so I did the only thing it was in my power to do, I untied a boat and tried to overtake the poor woman who had just disappeared. Unfortunately I did not see her again; her cloak was floating on the water. I picked it up. You know the rest."

"Did you know this woman?" inquired M. de Saint Senier, who seemed to be afraid to push his questions too far:

"I had never seen her before," replied Valnoir, with unblushing effrontery.

Then, reading doubt in the lieutenant's eyes, he hastened to add:

"Though, even if I had seen her before, which I am sure I had not, I should not have been able to recognize her, for the night was quite dark, and I did not see her face."

"Did you notice her dress?"

"No; that is, I only noticed this mantle," replied Valnoir, with rather less assurance, for he was beginning to marvel at M. de Saint Senier's persistence.

"I should be very glad to believe that you were telling the truth, sir," remarked the lieutenant, "but I feel obliged to tell you that you had previously seen the young girl who was drowned under your very eyes, you say."

"Indeed? I—I—I assure you I didn't know it," stammered Valnoir, considerably disconcerted.

"I will remind you of the circumstances under which you met her," said M. de Saint Senier, gravely but impressively.

"I should be greatly obliged to you if you would," murmured the journalist, rising to escape the searching gaze of his enemy. "But I must get away from the fire for a minute or two, it is becoming too hot for me."

As he spoke, he walked across the room to the only window it contained. His head was throbbing violently, and

he was about to press his hot forehead against the pane, when he fancied he saw a human form outside.

He was not mistaken. Two eyes that burned like coals of fire were looking straight at him.

The night was dark, and the bright fire that was blazing in the room prevented Valnoir from distinguishing objects outside very clearly, however.

Besides, the person had disappeared before there was time for any recognition.

M. de Saint Senier had not turned, but seemed to be awaiting a reply.

"I repeat, sir, that you had seen the young woman before," he said, slowly. "Besides, her dress was peculiar enough to attract your attention, and it is very strange, to say the least, that you did not recognize her."

"Can it be that you are referring to the young girl we met at Saint Germain?" inquired Valnoir.

"Precisely," replied the officer, rising to look his adversary full in the face:

"But in that case, even if I had failed to recognize her, she would have recognized me."

"That is exactly what I think," said M. de Saint Senier, coldly.

There was a long silence.

Valnoir resumed his seat on the stool in front of the fire, forgetting, in his embarrassment, that he had just complained of its ardor. The officer seemed to be engaged in following out an idea he hesitated to express.

"Look here," he at last said, abruptly, "I am going to speak frankly."

Valnoir bowed as if to thank him.

"Your story would seem very plausible to any one but me," continued the lieutenant, "but I am obliged to tell you that it is impossible for me to credit it."

"And why, if you please?" inquired the journalist, with an injured air.

"Because the young girl could not be thinking of suicide for the very good reason that she had the very best of reasons for clinging to life."

"Who can say?" interrupted Valnoir, shrugging his shoulders. "In a fit of despondency arising perhaps from an unfortunate love affair—"

"Don't slander her, I beg," broke in M. de Saint Senier, haughtily. She had a commission to perform, and she would not have yielded up her life of her own free will. Her death, consequently, is still a mystery to me, and until I learn the true cause of it, you will remain my prisoner."

"Then I am likely to remain in your custody a long time," retorted Valnoir, in a mocking tone, "and great as is my gratitude, I can't say that I fancy the idea of spending my life at the outposts, even in my preserver's company."

"Would you prefer that I should conduct you into the presence of a judge who would demand to know what you were doing on the Seine at this hour of the night—a judge who wears a sword at his side, and from whose decision there is no appeal—the provost-marshal?"

The journalist turned pale,* but he did not lose his presence of mind. A remark made by M. de Saint Senier had attracted his attention.

"You alluded just now, sir," he said, more gravely, "to an important mission that had been confided to that young girl. May I ask what this mission was?"

"It was to meet me here this very evening," replied the lieutenant.

"Very well, then, with this item of information and others which you can doubtless furnish, the provost-marshal will have no difficulty in discovering the truth, and I am perfectly willing to be taken before him."

For Valnoir felt sure that his adversary would think twice before making this affair public by reporting it to the

provost-marshal, and M. de Saint Senier's manner shewed that the journalist was perfectly right in this surmise, for he bit his lip as if he regretted having said too much.

Valnoir deemed it a favorable moment for striking a decisive blow.

"I think, sir," he began, more lightly, "that we have both made a mistake. I refused to fight with you because I thought it wrong to fight with a man who had just saved my life; and you now threaten me with arrest for a crime I have not committed. I think it would be wiser for us to defer the settlement of an affair that seems by no means urgent. As the investiture of the city is complete, I could not leave Paris if I wanted to, so you are sure of finding me whenever you choose, and I promise you, upon my word of honor, to hold myself entirely at your disposal, if you persist in your request for a hostile meeting. As to the strange affair of this evening," continued Valnoir, "I am as anxious to clear up the mystery as you can possibly be, and if you think that anything would be gained by making the facts public—"

"On the contrary, I am most anxious that what has occurred should be kept a secret from every one," interrupted the lieutenant, pausing in his excited tramp up and down the room, "and if I consent to what you ask, it will only be on condition that you keep the affair a profound secret."

"I can cheerfully promise you that!" exclaimed the journalist, delighted to get out of the scrape so easily.

"Then to-morrow morning you can return to Paris, but I shall rely upon your promise, and I shall send two of my friends to remind you of it as soon as my company is relieved. You are now free, sir."

Valnoir was about to leave the room when the door was hastily opened.

"Regina!" cried M. de Saint Senier, who had turned at the sound. Mlle. de Charmière's lover recoiled in astonishment and terror.

The young girl he had supposed dead, stood before him, clothed exactly as she had been on the day of the duel, and he started back as if he had been suddenly confronted by a specter, but Regina did not seem to see him.

On the contrary, she walked straight up to the officer, who was trembling with emotion and joy, and handed him a letter.

"So you are living!" murmured the young officer, pressing her hands warmly. "But how did you manage to escape death? Who saved you? But I forget that you can not hear me," he added, with an impatient gesture.

But Regina had doubtless understood the question by the movement of the officer's lips, for she imitated with her arms the movements of a swimmer.

Valnoir began to understand.

"She plunged into the river to escape me," he thought, "and I paid dearly for my attempt to pursue her."

"But why did you expose yourself to such danger?" continued M. de Saint Senier, seating the girl by the fire, for her garments were still dripping with water. "Why did Renée send you so late?"

Regina again proved that she could hear with her eyes, for she placed a finger upon her lips.

"Ah, ha!" thought the journalist, "she comes at the bidding of Mademoiselle de Saint Senier, that is evident."

By an even more significant gesture, the young girl bade the officer read the letter she had just given him, and M. de Saint Senier broke with a trembling hand the large black seal whose device the keen eyes of the journalist had already distinguished.

As the perusal of the letter proceeded, the lieutenant's face brightened, and as he read the concluding words two big tears rolled down his cheeks.

Regina watched every change of expression with eager attention.

"Thanks, thanks," he said, earnestly, "but do not ex-

pose yourself to such danger again. In a few days I shall be able to go and see them—”

Again a quick movement on the part of the girl reminded him that Valnoir was present.

That gentleman, thinking that he should not be able to gain much information from a conversation which Regina always took good care to interrupt just at the critical moment, concluded to take his departure.

“I am going now, sir,” he said, courteously, turning to the lieutenant; “but permit me to express my gratification at seeing alive and well a person in whom you seem to take a deep interest. I am happy, too, to have been able to prove my innocence before my departure,” he added, with a forced smile.

“I was mistaken, sir,” said the officer, gravely, “and I repeat that you are free.”

Valnoir bowed and turned to go, but Regina sprung between him and the door, stretching out both arms as if to bar his passage.

The lieutenant seemed to be even more alarmed than the editor of the “Serpenteau” by this strange and unexpected demonstration on the part of the young girl.

“Why do you wish to prevent this gentleman’s departure?” he asked, slowly, as if to give her time to follow each movement of his lips.

This time, Regina did not seem to understand him.

“This is intended as a joke, no doubt,” ventured Valnoir, with a poor attempt at a smile.

“One does not jest when one has just escaped death,” replied M. de Saint Senier, gravely.

“Then will you be kind enough to put an end to a scene which would undoubtedly prove a great success on the stage of the Porte Saint Martin, but which seems to be very much out of place here?”

“I have told you twice, sir, that you are free, and I do not forbid your departure now, though I know this young girl

well enough to feel sure that she must have some good reason for wishing to detain you."

"But I am unable to ask her what it is, unfortunately," sneered the journalist.

"She will explain it, however, and not entirely to your satisfaction, I fear," retorted M. de Saint Senier, to whom Valnoir's manner seemed decidedly offensive.

"The sooner the better, then, for it is nearly morning, and I have more important business on hand."

These words, uttered in an insolent tone, made the lieutenant cast aside his air of cold reserve, and walking straight up to the prisoner, and looking him full in the face, he said:

"There is a very easy way to settle the matter. I have two swords; the room is large enough, and we will fight here and now. If you kill me, you can return to Paris to fabricate fresh slanders."

"And this lady is to serve in the capacity of second?" inquired Valnoir, ironically.

"Exactly," was the cold reply.

Though he had no desire to expose himself to the dangers of another duel, the journalist was beginning to fear that it would be impossible to avoid it, for M. de Saint Senier had already started for the corner of the room where he had deposited his weapons.

Regina had not moved, but she was watching M. de Saint-Senier's every movement, though, as yet, there was nothing that indicated any intention of interfering on her part.

The lieutenant was busily engaged in examining the swords he had drawn from their scabbards, when a lively fusillade resounded from the river—a fusillade in which the shrill reports of *chasse-pots* alternated with shots of a deeper tone.

M. de Saint Senier hesitated a moment, and it was evident that he could not decide whether to close with his antagonist or hasten out to assume command of his men.

"You can go, sir," said Valnoir, with the slightest tinge of irony in his voice. "I promise to await your return."

This assurance did not seem to satisfy the officer, however, for instead of going toward the door, he opened the window and blew two shrill blasts upon a small silver whistle he wore about his neck.

A moment had scarcely elapsed when Landreau's voice was heard outside.

"It is nothing, Monsieur Roger," he said in a perfectly calm voice. "That simpleton Tournois was fool enough to show himself on the river bank, that is all, and the Prussians caught sight of him."

"Is any one hurt?"

"Not a soul; they aimed too high, as usual, the idiots!"

"Very well, go back to the river, but call me if the affair becomes serious."

"Very well, Monsieur Roger. I'll keep an eye on them; never fear."

M. de Saint Senier closed the window and resumed his examination of the swords.

"Once more, and for the last time," remarked Valnoir, "I will remind you that a duel under the conditions you propose, is not only absurd but unheard of."

"That doesn't matter," replied the lieutenant coldly, but resolutely. "I have decided to end the matter, here and now."

"But what if I should refuse to fight?"

"If you refuse, I shall take measures to compel you to fight."

This reply was accompanied by such a threatening gesture that Valnoir saw that there was no escape for him.

The officer pushed aside the table that stood in the middle of the room, and then approaching Valnoir, held out both swords to allow him to take his choice. The firing had not ceased: indeed, the engagement seemed to be increasing in violence.

Valnoir had taken one sword, and was removing his coat, when some one rapped loudly on the window.

"Lieutenant!" cried a voice without; "Landreau sends me to tell you that we have two men wounded already, and that the Prussians seem to be crossing the river."

"I am coming," replied the lieutenant. Then turning to Valnoir, he added:

"Will you accompany me?"

The editor-in-chief of the "Serpenteau" hesitated an instant, but feeling the necessity of getting rid of Regina at any cost, he finally answered boldly:

"I am ready. Give me a gun so I can be of some use. I would rather be killed by the enemy than by you."

"So be it," responded M. de Saint Senier, buckling on his belt.

He was about to rush from the room, followed by Valnoir, when the young girl touched him on the arm.

"What is it, Regina?" he asked hurriedly.

Pointing to Valnoir with one hand, she made a negative movement of the head, as if to say:

"He must not be allowed to go."

M. de Saint Senier, though greatly surprised, tried to hurry by her, but the girl held him firmly.

"But, Regina, my girl, I must go," said the officer kindly.

The firing seemed to come nearer.

"We are losing time, monsieur," cried Valnoir, "and if you will take my advice, you will leave mademoiselle here."

"Good-bye, Regina," cried M. de Saint Senier, making a rush for the door.

But the young girl intercepted him, as she had previously intercepted Valnoir, but this time, with a rapid movement she slipped her hand in her bosom, and drew out a slip of paper which she handed to the officer.

"Wretch!" he exclaimed, turning fiercely upon Valnoir, as soon as he had glanced over it.

But at that very instant the door was thrown violently open, and the old gamekeeper burst into the room.

"Monsieur Roger," he cried, breathlessly, "the Prussians are upon us. They have crossed the Seine. We shall certainly be taken prisoners."

M. de Saint Senier rushed out, and Regina, unable to detain him, followed him, clinging to his clothing. The clamor without increased in violence, and Valnoir was endeavoring to decide whether to flee or remain where he was, when his eyes fell upon a scrap of paper that the lieutenant had tossed upon the table as he left the room.

Snatching it up, the journalist saw these words written in a clear, bold hand:

"This man and his accomplice foully murdered your

CHAPTER IV.

VALNOIR, like many other men of letters, resided in what is known as the Saint George quarter.

The success of the "Serpenteau" was still too recent to have enriched its editor-in-chief to any great extent, and though he spent a good deal of money, Mlle. de Charmière's admirer had not yet dared to take up his abode in the expensive neighborhood of the Madeleine.

Rose often jested with her lover about his plebeian tastes, but being of an eminently practical turn of mind, she wisely came to the conclusion that the more money he saved, the more he would have to lavish upon her by and by, so it came to pass that the man who thought nothing of spending three louis for a dinner at the Café Anglais, and who never walked a block, still occupied a six hundred-franc lodging, and had no servant but his porter.

Still, it must be admitted that the abode he had fitted up for himself in this locality so dear to Bohemians was not wanting in comfort, or even in elegance.

His windows overlooked an extensive garden, and he had four rooms, all of which were furnished with a great deal of taste. His favorite apartment, however, was a small smoking-room, where he had collected all the conveniences for writing and sleeping, as well as for smoking.

An oak table, a large sofa, covered with some Persian stuff, two arm-chairs, and pipes of every shape and size, constituted the entire appointments of this room, into which only intimate friends were admitted.

It was here that the journalist entrenched himself on the day following the eventful night he spent on the Seine.

After the skirmish that freed him from M. de Saint Senier and Regina, Valnoir lost no time in making his escape from a spot that had become dangerous in every respect, and after making his way home, he went to sleep with the consoling thought that the lieutenant and his companion had either been killed or taken prisoner by the Prussians, and that he was well rid of them in either case.

On waking about noon, Valnoir found upon the little table by his bedside the following note from Mlle. de Charmière:

"You chose to spend last evening away from me, and I shall spend to-day without you, though you have my permission to call at three o'clock to-morrow. In the meantime, Taupier will give you news of me, and tell you all about our plans for the organization of the 'Moon with the Teeth.'"

It being too late to send any copy to the office of the "Serpenteau," Valnoir decided to pass the day at home in attending to his neglected correspondence.

"Taupier will drop in presently," he said to himself, with a yawn, "and he will tell me how the evening ended."

"Ah, good-morning, Master Bourignard," he exclaimed, seeing his *concierge* enter, tray in hand. "You seem to have guessed that I needed a cup of tea this morning. Your discernment does you honor. Take the tray into the

smoking-room, and don't let any one but Monsieur Tautier in to-day."

The person thus complimented was the possessor of a long, hooked nose and a very prominent chin that evinced a strong inclination to approach each other, and wore gold bowed spectacles—more for ornament than use probably, as they usually adorned the top of his bald head—and a blue coat with silver buttons, fashioned after the garment worn by Robespierre on the day of the fête of the Supreme Being, while his thin neck was swathed in a large white cravat.

"I am flattered by your approval, citizen editor," he replied, in a voice that seemed to come from the inmost recesses of his enormous nose; "but I must ask you not to apply the title of noble father to me."

"Of course not, if you don't like it; but I thought I was paying you a great compliment."

"I am a father, it is true, and I am proud of it, for my son Agricola is a great comfort to me, but I am not of noble birth, and I am glad of it, for if I were—"

"If you were, you would love the nobility and now you can't endure them," interrupted Valnoir with a hearty laugh. "Come, Bourignard, pour out my tea. That pays much better than talking politics."

The *concierge* concluded to follow his employer into the smoking-room, and began to prepare breakfast without losing any of the majesty of mien peculiar to him.

"The news is very encouraging this morning," he remarked, "and I think we shall soon be rid of William's barbarous hordes."

"Encouraging, my dear Bourignard, encouraging! Why, the Prussians crossed the Seine last night, and our outposts were obliged to retreat under the cannon of the forts for protection."

"It is very evident that monsieur does not know what I know," replied the porter, with a meaning smile.

"And what do you know, my great strategist?"

"I know that Gringalet is here, and that he will not allow one of the soldiers of despotism to return to Prussia," replied the patriotic *concierge*.

"And who is Gringalet?" inquired the journalist, trying hard to keep his face straight.

"Gringalet is a sailor, sir, who superintends the firing of all our guns, one after another, and who never misses his aim. A host in himself is Gringalet, and that is the reason I have dressed my son Agricola like a sailor. His mother wanted to buy him a soldier suit, but I opposed it, because I suspect the militia of having brought conservative ideas from their native provinces. But I must not forget to tell monsieur that some one called to see him a short time ago."

"Who was it? One of the militia?"

"Yes, and an officer. He was accompanied by a very aristocratic-looking civilian. I told him that monsieur was asleep, and they said they would call again, this evening, or to-morrow morning."

Bourignard little suspected the startling nature of this announcement, for the editor-in-chief, who had momentarily forgotten his mishaps of the night before, found himself rudely awakened to a threatening reality.

"Venerable father of Agricola!" he said, with a smile that strongly resembled a grimace, however, "I have no further need of your services, and having three articles to write—"

"Very well, very well, monsieur; very well, citizen, I will now give my attention to other duties," replied the pompous porter, no whit disconcerted. "If the aristocrats call again what must I say to them?"

"Tell them I'm not at home," answered Valnoir, promptly. "Taupier is the only person I want to see to-day."

"Very well, monsieur; very well, citizen," grumbled

Bourignard. "Citizen Taupier is a true patriot, and one can not fail to profit by his society."

The journalist, on being left alone, lighted a pipe, and stretched himself out upon the sofa.

"What could that gypsy girl have meant?" he said to himself, drawing the paper, in which she accused him of murder, from his pocket.

He read the words over and over again, without gaining any insight into their real significance, however.

"My accomplice!" he muttered. "It must be Taupier that she refers to; but it seems to me that though I had the misfortune to kill my man I at least killed him in a perfectly fair way. Podensac will certainly testify to that fact, if necessary. And she prates about murder, and this fool of a lieutenant seems to believe her. Bah! I am certainly even more of a fool to trouble myself about the matter. The girl is mad, unquestionably, and as for this other duel the lieutenant seems resolved to force upon me, I certainly defy him to find any seconds."

Satisfied by this reassuring reasoning, Valnoir rose, and began to collect his writing materials.

He had rather neglected his duties as editor-in-chief of the "Serpenteau" for the past twenty-four hours, and he felt the need of working off his ill-humor by annihilating some political opponent.

But he had scarcely penned a dozen lines before he discovered that insults did not flow from his pen as freely as usual; the bewitching face of Rose came between him and the venomous words he was putting upon paper, and he finally abandoned a rather labored tirade to reflect upon her dinner of the evening before, and her singular guests.

He was thus engaged when the angular form of Taupier suddenly appeared before him.

"So here you are!" he exclaimed, delighted at this diversion. "I did not expect to see you so soon."

"Thanks!" growled Taupier, who did not seem to be in the best of humor.

"Come, come, my friend, don't be sulky. Sit down and tell me if there was any increase in the circulation of our paper yesterday."

"No, nor will there be until the 'Serpenteau' comes boldly out as the exponent of socialism."

"Say rather of the fusionists," corrected Valnoir, laughing. "What do you think of that clown's theories?"

"I came here to talk that very matter over with you. You are a very clever writer, and your style is remarkably forcible and convincing, unquestionably, but you are the veriest greenhorn in politics, and I came here to-day to ask you again if you would not unite with us—"

"With us—the hunchbacks of Paris?" asked Valnoir, insolently.

"With us—the founders of the 'Society of the Moon with the Teeth,'" continued Taupier, ignoring the taunt.

This time the editor-in-chief burst into a loud laugh, and clapped his hands boisterously.

"Before I decide do me the favor to explain this puzzle," he said, at last, handing the hunchback the scrap of paper picked up the night before.

Taupier perused it carefully, though at first his face expressed the astonishment of a man who finds himself suddenly confronted by some undecipherable hieroglyphics.

"Well?" he asked, coldly.

"Well, this scrap of writing brands us both as assassins. I am the man mentioned in the note; you are the accomplice, and the murdered man is my antagonist in the duel at Saint Germain, of course."

This explanation made the imperturbable hunchback change color.

"Where did this paper come from?" he inquired, with undisguised alarm.

"It would take too long to explain fully, but this much"

I will say: It was handed, in my presence, to Monsieur de Saint Senier, a lieutenant in the Garde Mobile, and a cousin of the dead man, by a sort of fortune-teller connected with your friend Pilevert's traveling company."

"She, too!" muttered Taupier.

"Why do you say that?" asked Valnoir. "Can it be that they, too, suspect me of such a dastardly crime?"

"Perhaps so," replied the hunchback, after a silence.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the exasperated journalist. "And you take it in this fashion, you whom these people regard as an accomplice! I, for my part, assure you that I have no intention of allowing myself to be thus insulted by scoundrels of this stamp, and if you desert me I shall certainly make it my business to vindicate myself."

"Who told you that I had any intention of deserting you? and how can I give you any advice when you will not even tell me what has occurred?"

"I have told you enough, but here is the whole story in a nutshell: I met the gypsy girl, last night, in the street, and was fool enough to follow her. She jumped into the river to get rid of me, and I very narrowly escaped drowning in my efforts to rescue her. We both finally fell into Saint Senier's hands. He, with his men, was guarding one of the outposts. He tried to compel me to fight with him, and I was about to do so when the Prussians attacked the post."

"And you succeeded in making your escape?"

"Yes, but not until after the girl had given the lieutenant the scrap of writing I just showed you. She can not talk, but she can write, as you see. What do you think of the situation now?"

"I think that both the officer and the deaf and dumb girl are now on their way to Prussia, for our reporter told me this morning that all the men on guard at that point had been captured."

"You are very much mistaken, then, for Saint Senier's seconds called on me a few hours ago."

"Did you see them?"

"No, I was asleep, but they told Bourignard that they would call again."

"They mustn't find you at home when they do."

"Upon my word! one would suppose that you really attached some importance to this simpleton's absurd accusation. This is the way you would answer if we had really murdered that naval officer."

"If I were accused of having stolen the towers of Notre Dame I should flee without loss of time," said the hunchback, sententiously.

"Taupier, it strikes me that you are the biggest fool I ever saw," snarled the editor-in-chief, beginning to stride up and down the smoking-room in a towering rage.

"Do you suppose I regard it as any laughing matter when I find that the thing has been discovered?" responded Taupier.

Valnoir sprung upon the speaker, and seizing him roughly by the collar, exclaimed:

"I always knew that you were a coward, but I am made of different stuff, I tell you, and I am afraid of no one. Do you understand me? I am afraid of no one, for though I killed Monsieur de Saint Senier, I killed him fairly."

"Are you sure of that?" queried the hunchback, with a malevolent grin.

Valnoir retreated a step, and turned as pale as death.

"Wretch, what do you mean?" he stammered.

"I mean that the girl is right, and that you had better unite with me in devising some way to avert the danger that threatens us instead of flying into a passion."

"But you must have misunderstood her. You can not have read this infamous charge."

"On the contrary, I can repeat the words by heart; and I say again that what she has written is only the truth. You murdered Monsieur de Saint Senier, and I am your accomplice."

Valnoir passed his hand over his forehead like a man who is endeavoring to collect his wandering thoughts. He was beginning to believe that the hunchback had suddenly gone mad, for his tone was too serious to convey any impression of jesting.

"So be it!" he exclaimed, with a forced laugh. "I assassinated Monsieur de Saint Senier, without knowing it. I am Valnoir, or the Unconscious Criminal—a fine title that for a melodrama. But I should really like to hear some of the particulars of my crime."

"The whole affair can be easily explained," replied the hunchback, with a coolness that froze the blood of the editor-in-chief. "You were to fight with a man who was a dead shot, and who was to have the privilege of firing first. According to all human probabilities, you were a dead man. I wanted to equalize your chances, that is all."

"I—I don't understand you," stammered Valnoir, who was beginning to comprehend at least a part of the truth.

"You will understand very soon. I have no intention of concealing anything from you, so I tell you plainly that I was very anxious to save your life, and that I concocted a little plot to protect you from a catastrophe which seemed only too probable. Had I hesitated, your presentiments and your nervousness at the time of the duel would have decided me. One aims badly when one has been digging up the earth to—you know what—and still worse when one is troubled with superstitious fancies. You spoke so sadly of your father, who was shot in June, 1848, that you would doubtless have met with a similar fate if I had not taken my precautions."

"What did you do?" demanded the now terrified journalist.

"In loading the pistols I placed a bullet in one and a blank cartridge in the other, and I so managed it that the naval officer chose the harmless weapon."

"You villain!" exclaimed Valnoir, seizing the hunchback by the throat.

Taupier freed himself from the journalist's grasp with a vigor surprising in one of his physique, and hastily retreated behind the table.

"It is you, you alone who are guilty!" continued Valnoir, passionately. "I neither saw nor touched the pistols, and no one can accuse me of an infamous crime you committed entirely of your own accord, and without my knowledge."

"No one but the gypsy girl, it seems."

"But the girl is mistaken, as I will prove to her, for you, and you alone, shall bear the odium of your crime."

"That is a very clever idea, but I think you will have some difficulty in separating our two cases. You have studied law, and you are familiar with the Latin axiom that says, 'The culprit is the person who profits by the crime,' and who, pray, was the person who profited by your adversary's death?"

The argument was a convincing one. Valnoir dropped upon the sofa and buried his face in his hands.

A long silence followed.

"But, wretch, you are ruining me, and ruining yourself with me," murmured Valnoir, at last, in a voice hoarse with emotion.

"Possibly," said Taupier, with an air of the utmost indifference.

"You can not have listened to what I told you or you must forget that your dastardly act is known, and that you did not even have the shrewdness to perform it in private."

"But how could I have foreseen that we were to be watched by a whole company of mountebanks?" cried the hunchback in the petulant tone of an artist who has just been informed of a serious flaw in his work. "I managed to get rid of the cousin, and even of Podensac before I began to load the pistols, but I had no idea that a clump of bushes was serving as a screen for those miserable acrobats."

"So that young girl is not the only person who knows the truth?"

"Well, no," replied Taupier, tranquilly. "There are at least three persons who are acquainted with our secret."

He took care to emphasize the word *our*, but though Valnoir shuddered he had not the courage to protest.

"It seems to me that you are becoming more reasonable," continued the hunchback. "If you will listen to me only two minutes I feel sure that we shall come to a satisfactory understanding."

Valnoir shook his head with an air that Taupier took for a threat.

"Oh, I don't ask you to thank me or even to approve my course," he resumed, with wonderful audacity, "but now the thing is done, you must admit that we had better try to avert the consequences. As I told you before, we have three persons to fight against, and possibly four, as the girl has informed the cousin of the state of affairs."

"Then the acrobat and his pupil also saw us—"

"The acrobat, as you are pleased to style the honorable messenger of the last of the Charmières, is conversant with all the details of the affair. He even has in his possession what magistrates would call an article of conviction, for he picked up the bullet I flung into the copse."

A deep groan burst from the unfortunate journalist.

"As to the philosopher, Alcindor," continued Taupier, "I am not sure that he condescended to descend from the heights of fusionism to take any note of this sublunary matter, but he was behind the bushes with his master, and it is more than probable that he saw my little maneuver as plainly as Pilevert did."

"Then we are lost!" muttered Valnoir.

"Nonsense! We have only four witnesses to sustain the charge—to speak in the language of the courts—and two of them will say nothing without my permission."

"How is that?" inquired the editor-in-chief of the "Serpenteau," timidly.

"It ought not to be difficult for you to guess. By placing our paper at the service of the new society, so happily styled the 'Moon with the Teeth,' I can be assured of the blind devotion of Hercules and his follower."

"I will do nothing of the kind!" cried Valnoir. "I absolutely refuse to support the absurd theories of those idiots. The paper wouldn't have a purchaser in a week."

"Then I see no way of preventing them from telling all they know," retorted Taupier, coldly. "Besides, who said anything about supporting these doctrines with your pen. Do you imagine that the future members of the society will read your articles? There is a very good reason why the majority should refrain from doing so, for they have neglected to learn the alphabet."

"I don't understand you."

"Why, simpleton that you are! don't you know that your talent as a pamphlet-writer makes you a power—a power which they will be glad to use for the demolition of capitalist and employers and all in authority who would prevent the spread of fusionist ideas?"

"But even if I should consent to dishonor myself to purchase the silence of these fools, we should still be at the mercy of that girl and Monsieur de Saint Senier!"

"That is an entirely different matter, but I will promise to take charge of that, also, provided you will tell me all you know about the two persons in question."

"I have told you all I know."

"So far as Monsieur de Saint Senier is concerned," continued the hunchback, without paying any attention to the interruption, "he is not very dangerous, for even if the Prussians have not freed us from his unwelcome presence, he did not see what was done, and he can accuse us merely from hearsay."

"That is enough," murmured the journalist.

"On the contrary, it amounts to nothing at all," retorted the hunchback, curtly. "The girl remains, however; and she can injure us very seriously if I don't take measures to prevent it. Where did you meet her last evening?"

"Behind the Madeleine."

"Alone?"

"Yes, but it seemed to me that she had just left some one who drove away in a carriage, just as I reached the spot."

"A man?"

"No, a lady, for I saw her put her head out of the window, and wave the girl a farewell."

"Was the lady in a hackney coach?"

"Yes, in a hack drawn by a pair of gray horses, I recollect."

"You didn't notice the number, I suppose?"

"I didn't think of looking at that; besides, the vehicle was some distance off when I found myself face to face with the damsel."

"That's a pity," muttered Taupier. "Just think of it, a tiny scrap of paper like this would tell us all we want to know," he continued, picking up a card that happened to be lying on the table. "But where did this come from?" he exclaimed, suddenly.

"I have no idea," replied Valnoir, glancing at the bit of pasteboard the hunchback held out for his inspection.

It was one of the cards that coachmen are obliged by law to give to the person who hires their carriage, but it was so badly crumpled that the number was scarcely legible. Indeed, its appearance seemed to indicate that it had lain in water for some time."

"Try to recollect if you didn't take a fiacre yesterday, and if this card didn't fall out of your pocket after your return."

"On the contrary. I am sure that this card was not here this morning, for if it had been Bourignard, who has

a perfect mania for cleaning up, would have taken it away."

"In that case you must have dropped it on the table without knowing it, when you showed me that fortune-teller's note."

"That is possible."

"It is absolutely certain. Do you recollect the girl's movements when she produced her formal charge against you?"

"Perfectly. She drew it from her bosom, where it had been concealed, and reduced almost to a pulp by the water. The lieutenant barely glanced at it before he threw it on the table beside him, where I afterward found it and slipped it hastily into my pocket."

"And you didn't look at it again until just now?"

"No."

"Very well," exclaimed Taupier, triumphantly. "We have the clew now, for with the aid of this scrap of paste-board we shall have very little difficulty in ascertaining who the fortune-teller met back of the church. In fact, I have an idea that I know already."

"You are much sharper than I am, then."

"Try to recollect if you did not see a lady of your acquaintance ascend the steps of the Madeleine."

"No; I do not."

"I'll assist your memory a little. Your lady-love has better eyes than you have, and she took me into her confidence a little last evening."

"I am more and more in the dark."

"Who could have gone so late to say her prayers except a devotee, and a grief-stricken devotee at that?"

"Renée de Saint Senier!" exclaimed Valnoir, suddenly recollecting an incident that the adventures of the previous night had driven from his mind.

"You have guessed at last."

"True; I did see her entering the church."

"At what hour?"

"About sunset—some time before I met the gypsy."

"You forget that these pious aristocrats spend a long time at their devotions. Intrust this card bearing the number 5724 to me. By means of this talisman, and the exertions of a certain Citizen Frapillon, man of affairs, and treasurer of the 'Serpenteau,' I shall learn in three days all I wish to know."

"But if these persons were hiding in the bushes they must also have seen—"

"The little job we performed at the foot of the oak tree? I am not sure, but it is very probable. Still, so long as the Prussians hold Saint Germain I think we have no cause for uneasiness. Once more, now, let me ask you to intrust this card to me, and give me permission to begin with the assistance of our faithful Frapillon."

"So be it."

"As for the great society," continued the hunchback, "we will decide upon the by-laws to-morrow evening, at the celebrated Café Rat-Mort, and I hope you will honor us with your presence."

"Don't count upon me. I am by no means sure that I shall be at liberty to-morrow evening."

"Oh, you can ask Citizen Charmière to excuse you from attendance upon her for one evening," cried the irrepressible hunchback, turning toward the door, "and now I must hasten to Frapillon to guard your precious life from the fury of a country-squire, ingrate!"

In another moment Valnoir found himself once more alone with his own thoughts, which were much less cheerful than usual.

The revelation just made by the unscrupulous Taupier weighed heavily upon his conscience, and he asked himself if it would not be advisable to sever all connection with this scoundrel, and tell M. de Saint Senier all.

It was an honest and commendable impulse, and at any

other time the journalist would probably have followed it; but since Mlle. de Charmière had entered his life, the recollection of his enchantress was ever interposing between his resolutions and his acts.

"I had better consult Rose," he invariably said to himself, and this case proved no exception to the rule, so he lighted a cigar to kill time until the dinner-hour, and seated himself in an arm-chair to think over his late adventures.

His conversation with Taupier had been a very long one, and the sun was already gilding with its last rays the tops of the trees that adorned the terrace. Through the branches of the clematis, which covered the lattice, and which Bourignard did not disdain to water twice a day, Valnoir could see quite a long stretch of turf that was the favorite rendezvous of all the sparrows in the neighborhood.

This grass plot, which was rarely cut, surrounded a cottage or sort of chalet, which was probably once a sort of appendage to a large mansion, which had been demolished to make way for houses of a more profitable kind.

The windows of this cottage had never been opened before, at least, not to the knowledge of the journalist, who had always supposed it unoccupied.

But this evening, strange to say, the shutters in the lower story were all open, and though no one was visible on the piazza that encircled the house, the sunlight was streaming straight in through the open window of one of the apartments.

At the end of this room stood a large white curtained bed, at the foot of which Valnoir could plainly distinguish the figure of a kneeling woman. This woman was dressed in black, and her mourning costume harmonized perfectly with her attitude, for she seemed to be praying at the bedside of a dead person. Her back was turned toward Valnoir, who could judge of her age only by her figure, which was apparently that of a young person. • As for her pray-

ers, it was very difficult to divine for whom they were uttered, as the white curtains might cover a bier, or surround the bed of a sick person. The latter supposition, however, seemed most plausible, as a death in the cottage would inevitably have caused sufficient coming and going to attract the attention of the neighbors.

His late adventures were fast converting the rather skeptical journalist into a firm believer in the marvelous, and with Taupier's revelations still floating through his brain, it was enough for him to see a lady clad in mourning to remind him of Mlle. de Saint Senier, though what connection could there possibly be between the sister of his adversary, a denizen of the Faubourg Saint Germain, and the inmate of a lonely cottage in this unfashionable part of the city.

Valnoir knew that she had spent the summer at Maisons-Laffite, at the house of an aunt, who occupied in winter a charming little house on the Rue d'Anjou Saint Honorée.

But the editor of the "*Serpenteau*," though he dismissed the idea as improbable, remained at his post of observation until the daylight faded, and the interior of the apartment became lost in shadow. The white draperies were still visible, it is true, but the form of the kneeling woman could no longer be distinguished.

"She will be sure to light a candle presently, and I can then get a good look at the face of this despairing beauty," Valnoir said to himself.

He was aroused from these reflections by the entrance of the majestic Bourignard with the evening papers.

"The soldier has been here again, sir," said the citizen *concierge*, "but this time I told him that you had not been home since yesterday morning, and that I was beginning to feel very anxious about you."

"Very good, Father Bourignard, very good. You have a fertile imagination. And what did this provincial warrior say?"

"He did not seem very much surprised; indeed, I heard

him remark in a whisper aside to his companion, 'It is quite probable that he never will return,' whereupon the other replied: 'So much the better.'"

"Are you sure that is what they said?" cried Valnoir, eagerly.

"Perfectly sure, as sure as I am of knowing the Declaration of Independence by heart."

"Bourignard, you are a model *concierge*, and I'll give you tickets for the Variétés this week."

"If it's all the same to you, sir, I would rather have two tickets to the *café concert* to hear Madanie Bordas sing the 'Canaille.' My son Agricola prefers this hymn to any frivolous play."

"You shall have your tickets. By the way, Bourignard, the cottage opposite is occupied, is it not?"

"I can not say, for politics engross my attention to such an extent that I haven't time to notice what is going on in the neighborhood. Besides, the entrance to the cottage is on the Rue de Laval. I have seen no one about the house, however."

"I'm probably mistaken, then," remarked Valnoir, carelessly, for he did not care to take his porter into his confidence.

As soon as he found himself once more alone, he returned to his post of observation, but he had the disappointment of finding that the window had been closed during his conversation with his porter, and he could not discern the faintest ray of light through the shutters.

The curtain had fallen just as the play was becoming interesting, but Valnoir found some consolation in what Bourignard had just told him.

"They think I have been wounded or taken prisoner, and I am well rid of them, at least for a few days. Before Saint Senier becomes undeceived, I shall have time to take my precautions, for he doesn't spend much time in reading the papers, I'll wager."

This reminded him to glance over the papers the *concierge* had just brought in. The skirmish of the night before had not passed unnoticed of course. Indeed, in the first paper he opened, he found a long account of the nocturnal combat, to which the narrator had not failed to give colossal proportions.

The enemy had been vigorously repulsed, and had recrossed the Seine, taking many dead and wounded with them. Unfortunately, the lieutenant in command of the most advanced outpost was missing, and was generally supposed to have paid with his life the penalty of having allowed himself to be taken unawares.

All this was, of course, well calculated to reassure him.

"I believe I shall get safely out of this infernal scrape, after all," he muttered. "I see no mention made of the gypsy girl, so she must have disappeared, as well as Saint Senier, I suppose. I shall allow Taupier to arrange matters with the acrobat and his pupil, and before long I'll devise some way of getting rid of him, for this hunchback is really becoming too dangerous."

The only ominous indication was the visit of the two soldiers, but Valnoir easily persuaded himself that they had come merely for news of their comrade and friend, the lieutenant.

After having thus arranged matters to his satisfaction, Valnoir's spirits revived, and he decided to dress for evening, and then go and dine at a neighboring restaurant. He was about to leave the smoking-room with this intention, when the sound of a bell again attracted his attention to the neighboring garden.

"Hark!" he muttered, "that would seem to indicate that they have visitors at the mysterious cottage."

The ring, which was twice repeated, seemed to come from the entrance on the Rue de Laval, as Bourignard had said, so it was more than likely that the visitor, whoever he

might be, would soon appear on the grass-plot back of the house.

Valnoir blew out his candle and waited.

His perseverance was rewarded.

He had not waited five minutes when two human forms rounded the corner of the house. The evening was too dark to enable him to distinguish the sex of the persons who were slowly crossing the grass about fifty yards from him, but he could see that a very animated conversation was going on between them, for they paused from time to time, and gesticulated excitedly. Valnoir even thought that one of them frequently pointed up to the windows of the cottage, and from this fact he came to the conclusion that the room with the white-draped bed was under discussion.

The wind, which was quite strong, prevented their voices from reaching the terrace, to the great annoyance of the silent spectator of this scene.

"I am a simpleton to persist thus," thought the journalist. "I will make some inquiries on the Rue de Laval to-morrow, and probably what I learn will destroy all my curiosity on the subject."

Just as he was on the point of rising, he perceived that the promenaders had changed their course, and were gradually approaching the terrace.

"Oh, well," he said to himself, "I might as well see this thing out, now I am here. I shall perhaps succeed in finding out a little more about my neighbors, and after I have I'll go to dinner."

The couple advanced very slowly, by reason of frequent halts that greatly retarded their progress, and Valnoir was still unable to distinguish a word.

His heart throbbed violently, though he could not imagine why, and he felt himself chained to the spot by a strange spell he could not understand.

His curiosity seemed likely to be satisfied, for the mys-

terious promenaders finally came near enough for their voices to be overheard, but just then a loud burst of laughter resounded behind him.

"What the devil are you doing there?" cried the intolerable Taupier, who had just stolen into the room on tip-toe.

Before Valnoir had time to turn, the two persons he had been watching disappeared.

CHAPTER V.

THE office of J. B. Frapillon was in the third story of a house on the Rue Cadet.

The building, which consisted for the most part of two immense wings, separated by a long court-yard, was a veritable phalaustery. The lower floor was occupied by a wine-merchant, a dealer in musical instruments, and a book-seller.

The story above was leased by a decorator, and a so-called banker—though his real business consisted in loaning money at unlawful rates of interest to the small shop-keepers in the neighborhood—a dress-maker, and a manufacturer of artificial gems.

The apartments of J. B. Frapillon—who by the way was held in high esteem by the *concierge* on account of the handsome gratuity with which he always accompanied the payment of his quarter's rent—consisted of an ante-chamber, a very neat and primly furnished salon, a smaller room of similar aspect adjoining it, and several other apartments reserved for the personal use of the lessee.

J. B. Frapillon seemed to be of the opinion that a man's private life should be considered sacred, for the public never penetrated beyond the three communicating rooms first mentioned, which were separated from the other apartments by a passage-way to which one gained access by a

door directly opposite the public entrance, and into which one was admitted only by the proprietor himself.

One lovely autumn morning, the proprietor had evidently intrusted to his one clerk the task of receiving his ordinary clients, for he was immured in the most secluded corner of his private apartments giving an audience to a beautiful and elegantly dressed lady; no other, in fact, than Mlle. Rose de Charnière.

This apartment, from which the vulgar herd was rigorously excluded, was an oval room, whose adornments recalled the many vicissitudes of J. B. Trapillon's eventful life.

The walls were absolutely concealed from sight by a host of richly framed pictures and *objets d'art*, which had been picked up at auction sales, or taken as security for loans. There were no less than five chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, four clocks upon the mantel and consoles, and any quantity of silverware was upon the cabinets and sideboards; while upon the floor lay file after file of newspapers, and upon an immense desk several enormous copper-bound registers.

In this strange medley of heterogeneous articles, the only one that gave any clew to the personal tastes and character of the proprietor was a portrait of Hébert, in a walnut frame, surmounted with a crown of oak leaves.

The admirer of this celebrated communist of 1793 was a man about forty years of age, tall, stout, and adorned, in spite of his peaceable profession, with a reddish beard that would have done honor to a pioneer.

His mouth was large, the lips thin, the nose pointed, and the forehead rather low, despite the premature baldness that doubled its real dimensions. The small but keen and intelligent eyes gazed out at you from behind a pair of very slender steel-bowed spectacles.

There was in the face a mixture of craftiness and audacity, the cunning of a wily speculator, and the boldness of an unscrupulous scoundrel.

Mlle. de Charmière, who was sitting opposite him, wore the air of a great lady who condescends to ask a favor without losing any of her superiority. She had just entered, and was toying with the papers strewn over the desk like a woman who is inclined to regard business matters in much the same light as an order for a pair of shoes.

"Has anything new happened, my lady?" inquired the man with the spectacles. "You must be in great need of my services to call so early in the morning."

"You are right. I want to speak to you about Valnoir."

"I haven't seen him for three days; but the paper is prospering wonderfully."

"Then you think I have made a good investment?"

"Excellent. You will realize at least twenty per cent. upon it, besides being able to draw out your money at any time."

"You have said nothing to Valnoir, I hope?"

"For what do you take me? Valnoir still thinks that the person who advanced the money is an American."

"I am glad of it. That, however, is not the matter about which I desire your advice and assistance."

"I am at your orders, as you know very well."

Mlle. de Charmière toyed with the handle of her parasol, and appeared loath to speak.

"Is it really such a serious matter?" inquired the man of affairs, not accustomed to see his client embarrassed.

"My dear Frapillon, there is some one in my way," Rose said at last, in the resolute tone of a person who has just fully decided upon a course of action.

"Indeed! is it Taupier that troubles you?"

"Taupier? Well, yes; but not so much as another person."

"Who can it be, then?"

"A brother of mine," replied the lady, after a silence.

"A brother! I thought you had no relatives?"

"This is the only one I have left, and he is one too many."

"And this long-lost brother returns for the express purpose of demanding an allowance to live upon, I suppose?"

"If that were all, I could get off with an expenditure of two or three thousand francs, and so shouldn't mind it much."

"Oh, your brother is a shrewd fellow, then. It seems to run in the blood."

"Don't jest, if you please. He is in possession of a secret which may ruin Valnoir, me, you, and the paper."

J. B. Frapillon turned pale and adjusted his spectacles as if to conceal his agitation. He was about to speak, however, when the electric bell sounded.

"What is that?" inquired Mlle. de Charmière.

"Nothing. My clerk informs me of the arrival of a client, that is all."

"Go and see him, and then come back again."

"That is not necessary. He will wait. Tell me your story, my dear madame."

"I warn you that it will be a long one."

"I hope so, for you know my theory. When I am playing a game, I want to know all the cards in advance."

"I have no wish to conceal mine from you. As I remarked before, there is a secret, and this secret is connected with Valnoir."

"Do you know what it is?"

"Not yet. I only know that it is in some way connected with the duel in which Charles had the misfortune to kill Monsieur de Saint Senier."

"All this is very vague, and I fail to see what possible connection there can be—"

"So do I. If I did, I should not be obliged to consult you," retorted Mlle. de Charmière, dryly; "but if you had not interrupted me so often, you would have heard all I know before this time."

"Very true. Time is money, as the English say."

"Well," resumed the lady, rather impatiently, "this brother whom I have not seen for years returns to Paris just when I am least expecting him. To tell the truth, I thought he was dead, and I confess that I was not inconsolable. My brother has never done anything but endanger my prospects in life. Would you believe it, in spite of all I have done to assist him, he has fallen so low as to run about from one country fair to another, giving performances, and to come to Paris bringing a clown in his train. In fact, he presented himself at my house in this honorable company."

"How does it happen that you have been unable to get rid of these people?"

"I didn't wish to do so until I found out their secret. Indeed, I invited them to dinner and tried my best to make my brother talk, but though I got him as drunk as he could well be, I failed to extort any information of importance from him."

"That is a pity, for your idea was an excellent one."

"Perhaps I should have accomplished my object, but unfortunately Valnoir had taken it into his head to dine with me, and seeing that I knew him my brother became suspicious." *

"Oh, ho! that certainly complicates matters. Well, what did Valnoir seem to think of the meeting?"

"I don't know, but he certainly did not appear at all embarrassed."

"That would seem to indicate that he had no idea that his secret was known," Frapillon remarked, sagely.

"It is needless to say that I introduced my guest as a stranger who had come to bring me news of an exiled brother."

"A very clever idea that. But speaking of the secret, have you any idea what it is about?"

"It is evidently connected with something that must have occurred in the forest of Saint Germain. And right here I will admit, my friend, that in spite of my influence over Valnoir there is a part of his life that I know nothing about. Several times he has absented himself without any apparent cause, and I know that in every case it was to pay a visit to Saint Germain."

"The mystery is there evidently, and it is at Saint Germain that we must seek a solution of it, but we can not do that until the siege is over."

"And for that reason I have thought of another plan," remarked Mlle. de Charmière.

"Let me hear it, for plans seem to be quite the order of the day now."

"In the first place, I base some hopes upon a scheme of Taupier's, who is no favorite with me, as you know."

"My dear lady," said the man of affairs, slowly, "it would be a great pleasure to me to serve you, but before I make any attempts in that direction I must know exactly where I stand. It is of the utmost importance that we should understand each other fully."

"What do you mean?"

"I will explain my meaning more clearly. If your brother intends to make use of this secret it is for the purpose of blackmail, I suppose?"

"Probably."

"And this, of course, will be very prejudicial to the interests of Valnoir, who is your friend and mine."

"Of course."

"Very well. Do you propose to take sides with him or with your brother?"

On hearing this plain question Mlle. de Charmière could not help blushing, especially as the agent was gazing at her intently over his spectacles as if resolved to read her every thought.

"How can you suppose that I would hesitate between

the man I love and a brother who has been the bane of my life?" she asked, hypocritically, at last.

"Very well; then I am to take measures to worst your brother in his efforts," replied J. B. Frapillon, quietly. "By the way, what does this brother call himself?"

"Antoine Pilevert."

The electric bell resounded again, but this time the ringing continued several seconds, and this was the signal agreed upon as the announcement of an important visit.

"Will you allow me to see what is wanted?" inquired Frapillon.

"Certainly."

The gentleman availed himself of the permission, leaving Rose to wonder if she had not made a mistake in intrusting the management of the affair to him. Her confidence in his integrity was not implicit by any means, and his perfidious suggestions gave her abundant food for reflection.

"He is quite capable of doing the very thing he suggested to me himself," she thought. "What is there to prevent him from forming an alliance with my brother? I will certainly see Antoine again this evening, and try to get the truth out of him before I commit myself with Frapillon."

These reflections were interrupted by the stealthy entrance of the agent.

"It is he!" he said, softly, placing his finger on his lip.

"Who?"

"Your brother; Monsieur Antoine Pilevert in person."

"Already!" exclaimed Rose, not a little annoyed.

"Do you want me to send him away?"

"Oh, no; but I am anxious to know the result of the interview as soon as possible, and as I happen to be here—"

"You would like to remain. Do so, by all means."

"But it would not do for him to see me."

"He won't see you. You need have no fears of that. Just come with me."

The proposal was certainly a tempting one, especially as it would insure her against any possibility of treachery on the part of her factotum, but on the other hand the invitation was so unexpected that she hesitated to accept it for fear of falling into a trap.

"Is it possible that you have trap-doors here, as at a theater?" she asked, suspiciously.

"Oh, no; but opening out of my private office there is a large closet in which one can hear and see what passes there, that is all."

"It is certainly well for a person to know that," replied Mlle. de Charmière, laughing. "When you receive me in the office in question I shall take good care to satisfy myself that the closet is empty."

"Oh, our interviews always take place in the room where we are now, and where we have no listeners, I assure you."

"But what is the use of this system of espionage, if you please?"

"It is a part of my business. I often act as a sort of private detective, as you are aware, and this is an excellent way of furnishing clients with information first-hand."

"It is certainly a very ingenious way."

"But one that I seldom use, for it is not always easy to lure the game into the trap, so as a general thing I use the hiding-place merely to obtain a look at any strangers who may wish to see me. It was in this way that I just got a look at your brother, whom, by the way, I should have recognized even if my clerk had not handed me his card."

"What do you think of him?"

"He seemed to be in a great hurry, and in the worst of humor, for he was tramping about the office, gesticulating excitedly, and muttering to himself. I think it would not be prudent for me to keep him waiting much longer."

"I am ready."

Frapillon opened a door, and taking his fair client by

the hand, led her through a long passage-way, the floor of which was covered with a thick soft carpet that deadened the sound of their footsteps.

"Here it is," he whispered, lifting a *portière*.

- Two luminous spots gleamed in front of them, and Rose instantly mistrusted that the light came through two holes bored in the partition.

Her guide seated her in an arm-chair, and placed an eye to one of the openings, but no sooner had he done so than he exclaimed:

"Why! he has gone! I can't understand it," he whispered, turning to his client. "He must have become impatient. But I am sure that he is talking with the clerk in the outer office, and I will go and bring him back."

"But what if you should not overtake him?"

"In that case I will return immediately and release you."

Hastening back to his office, Frapillon found that his visitor had disappeared without leaving any other trace of his presence than a cigar thrown lighted upon the floor, as if to show his impatience, and he was about to rush after the fugitive when the door was burst open, and to his intense surprise he saw Pilevert enter, escorted, or rather pushed forward, by Taupier.

"Come, come, my good fellow, one can not desert one's friends like that," cried the hunchback.

"But I tell you that I'm in a hurry," growled the acrobat. "Alcindor is waiting for me."

"Let him wait, then. Come, let me introduce you to the pearl of cashiers, and the most democratic of bankers, Frapillon!"

That gentleman did not seem at all elated by Taupier's compliments; in fact, this invasion of his cabinet annoyed him greatly, especially as it disarranged all his plans, and he was already endeavoring to devise some pretext for shortening the interview.

Pilevert appeared equally embarrassed and annoyed.

Encountered upon the staircase just as he was going away, greatly out of humor at having been obliged to wait so long, he had been dragged back by Taupier; but though unable to prevent this, Pilevert was equally determined not to disclose his business in the presence of witnesses.

Of course he had not the slightest suspicion that his sister, too, was watching and listening; but Taupier's presence was sufficient to seal his lips.

"Come, what do you want, rampart of Avallon?" continued the incorrigible jester. "Did you come to secure an engagement for the Toulouse Circus, or for the Alcazar at Lyons? But no, I forgot. Politics are engrossing your attention now, and you are to be henceforth the mainstay of the 'Serpenteau.' Now speak and make known your wishes. My friend Frapillon is a universal genius. Is it information in regard to any particular person that you are seeking?"

"I don't know that it's any of your business," growled Pilevert.

"You are angry, I see. I know what to think now. It is information that you are after, and you are afraid to open your heart before me. You make a great mistake. I am your friend, and incapable of betraying your secrets. Do you want me to prove it? I will by telling you that I came for a similar purpose, and I will set you an example of confidence by disclosing my errand in your presence."

"And I am quite at your service," hastily interposed Frapillon, anxious to prevent the acrobat from explaining before Taupier.

"Well, here," began the hunchback, "is a card bearing the number 5724. I am anxious to find the coachman who gave this card last Wednesday evening, near the Madeleine, to a young woman in a red dress, and to learn where he took another lady dressed in black."

Pilevert had suddenly become very attentive, and his

eager expression did not escape Taupier, who instantly exclaimed:

"Why, now I think of it, Pilevert is the very person to assist us, as one of the parties I refer to is a young woman he knows intimately. I am talking, old fellow, about your somnambulist, the deaf and dumb girl you had with you at Saint Germain."

"Regina!" exclaimed the acrobat, "that good-for-nothing hussy!"

"Whew! it would seem that you no longer cherish her in your heart of hearts!"

"She has run away!" replied Pilevert, unable to restrain his wrath any longer. "She has deserted me!—a second father, who had cared for her for five long years."

"And you have no idea where she is?"

"Not the slightest, but if I ever find her—"

"You shall find her, Pilevert, I'll answer for that. When and where 'did she leave you?"

"After that accursed duel I left her at Rucil with the wagon and the dead man, while I went ahead to reconnoiter and find out what chance we had of getting to Paris. When I returned I found only the empty wagon."

"Well, now you have stated your case, suppose you allow me to state mine. Frapillon, Valnoir and I have a dangerous enemy in the sister of the officer whose career was so abruptly terminated at Saint Germain, and also in another, Saint Senier—the cousin of the victim. Both these persons are our mortal enemies; they are spreading all sorts of shameful reports in relation to us, and they have set the friend of our worthy Pilevert against us unquestionably. The cousin has just been captured by the Prussians, but his sister, assisted by the girl in red, is plotting to destroy us, and as in union there is strength, I propose that the friends of the 'Serpenteau', here and now form an offensive and defensive alliance against these foes."

"You can count upon me," replied Frapillon, "but I

should like to hear a few more particulars before beginning my search."

"You shall have them."

"Then the carriage will soon be found. It will probably take a little longer to find the ladies."

"How much time do you want?"

"A fortnight. If I don't finish the job by that time I'll abandon it forever."

"A fortnight then! So be it, citizen. The league against the enemies of the 'Serpenteau' is formed," added the hunchback, in a solemn tone.

CHAPTER VI.

OCTOBER came, and in proportion as the autumn advanced the radiant hopes that had brightened the early disasters of the unfortunate war of 1870 grew dim.

The siege of Paris was entering upon its second stage, that in which the population began to realize that the ordeal would be a long one, and that they must make up their minds to endure many privations.

Provisions were still to be had, and the temperature was still endurable, but one already foresaw the near approach of those two formidable Prussian auxiliaries, cold and famine.

The city no longer wore the animated and almost joyous air that immediately followed its investiture. The singing of patriotic songs had ceased; the stores closed early, carriages were becoming more rare, while in the streets, removed from the heart of the town, going and coming ceased almost entirely at nightfall.

On one particular evening the capital appeared even more gloomy and dull than usual. The cannon had thundered all day, and a *sortie* attempted by the troops had been repulsed.

The news of this failure had spread quickly through the town, and upon every face one saw an expression of disappointment.

Most of the pedestrians strode gloomily along with heads bowed upon their breast, and if a group formed on the pavement or upon a threshold it was only to talk in the subdued tones one uses in a sick-room.

There was mourning in the air, and some portions of the town had really assumed a most lugubrious aspect.

The Rue des Martyrs, usually so animated, had become silent, and in the dim light of the street-lamps only an occasional form could be seen gliding along in the shadow of the houses.

Near the top of the steep ascent which is formed at this point by the southern side of Montmartre, a solitary woman might have been seen hastening up the sidewalk on the left-hand side of the street. On reaching the corner of the Rue de Laval she paused an instant and cast a rapid glance behind her, as if to satisfy herself that she was not followed. The result proved eminently satisfactory, for no other human soul was visible, so turning into the Rue de Laval, she began to run like a person who was nearing her goal. In a few seconds, she reached a tall stone wall in the middle of which was a small door that seemed to be used but rarely, for the lock was rusty and the hinges were beginning to fall to pieces.

*This door, however, was opened almost instantly in answer to her ring, and she passed in, though not without casting another hurried glance behind her.

The high wall concealed a narrow walk, bordered with lindens, whose branches met and formed an arch, at the further end of which a light was shining, and after pausing a moment as if to assure herself that no one was passing on the street without, she started resolutely upon her rather gloomy way.

“So you have come at last!” exclaimed a gruff voice.

"The ladies were beginning to be very uneasy, you have kept them waiting so long.

"Confound it! here I am forgetting that she can't hear anything," added the speaker, taking up the lamp to light Regina—for it was she—through a glass gallery.

The young girl followed him, removing as she walked a hooded mantle that had enveloped her from head to foot. She had laid aside the odd costume she had worn up to the night of her adventure with Valnoir, but her black woollen dress and the lace scarf she had thrown over her bare head made her remarkable beauty all the more apparent, for her large dark eyes sparkled with marvelous brilliancy, and her rapid walk had imparted a delicate rose-tint to her usually colorless cheek.

Her guide seemed to be struck by her loveliness, for he could not help muttering:

"Only to think of such a beautiful young girl running about from fair to fair, in company with a clown and tight-rope performer. She is virtuous, too, and as brave as a lion. If I had not placed myself in front of her she would have been killed by the same Prussian that wounded poor Monsieur Roger. This way, mademoiselle," he added, opening a door; "the ladies are in here."

Two ladies were sitting by a round table in the middle of the plainly furnished room. The elder lady was reading a letter, the other was holding a book which she hastily dropped upon the table on seeing the young girl.

"Here she is at last," remarked the guide, "and I think she has good news for us, for she wears a joyful air."

Regina hastened to the old lady and kissed her hand.

"Heaven be praised, my dear child! We have been shuddering to think of your being out so late in the streets of this wicked city."

These words were uttered in a kind and sympathetic voice, and Regina must have understood them, for she replied with a look that expressed the deepest gratitude.

The speaker was over sixty years of age, but she was neither bent nor wrinkled, and had not her hair been snow-white no one would have suspected her real age.

She must have been remarkably handsome in her youth, and the aristocratic contour of her features increased a naturally haughty expression that was tempered by the sweetness of her blue eyes.

Besides, to judge of what she had been in her youth, one had only to look at the young girl beside her, who was her living image, with all the charms and freshness of twenty years.

A tall and slender blonde, Mlle. Renée de Saint Senier was the very ideal of an English beauty, characterized by a delicacy of outline and a vivacity of movement and expression that are seldom seen on the other side of the Channel.

Her aunt, her father's sister, and the Dowager Countess de Muire, was a perfect specimen of a countess of the old school, and her noble descent was even more apparent in her manners than in her person.

"Sit down, my child," she said, pointing to a chair. "Landreau, have you taken care to close the shutters securely?" she added, turning to the servant who had ushered the young girl into the room.

"There is no danger of my forgetting your orders, Madame la Comtesse," replied the old servant. "There have been too many suspicious-looking characters prowling around the cottage of late."

"Very well, my friend; keep a sharp watch. Renée, my dear, show this child the letter that tells us Roger is wounded and a prisoner at Saint Germain."

Mlle. de Saint Senier handed Regina an official-looking document. The young girl seized it eagerly, and as she proceeded with its perusal her face brightened, though her eyes filled with tears.

"Poor child! how good and devoted she is!" exclaimed Mme. de Muire.

"She has, indeed, proved herself so, aunt," replied Mlle. de Saint Senier, gazing at their guest tenderly; "and I hope that we shall be able to keep her with us always."

"I desire it as much as you possibly can, my dear child; but I am continually tormented by a fear that she will fall into the clutches of that wretched acrobat. Don't you think, too, that the persistency with which she conceals her history from us is very strange, to say the least?"

"She is timid, and inclined to be suspicious, like all who have suffered," said Renée; "but I am sure that she will tell me some day."

"You speak as if she had the power of speech," remarked Mme. de Muire, smiling. "It is true, however, that she writes with an ease and correctness that astonishes me."

"Have you also noticed her remarkable intelligence, aunt? She seems to hear with her eyes."

"I can not help thinking that this young girl must have been reared by well-bred people," remarked the old lady, thoughtfully. "But let us talk of our poor Roger. How much he must suffer at being thus separated from us!—even more than from his wound. Don't you think so, Renée?"

Mlle. de Saint-Senier blushed slightly.

"Yes, aunt," she replied. "Oh, if we could but send him news of us, let him know that our anxiety is less keen!"

"Who knows but some clever and daring messenger might succeed in getting through the lines. What do you think, Landreau?"

"It would be no easy matter, countess. If it were merely a matter of risking one's life, mine would be at your service, madame; but those rascally Prussians keep such a sharp watch that no one can pass. I should be captured, and I should not even have the satisfaction of seeing Monsieur Roger, for I should be sent straight to Germany."

"Alas! he is right," sighed the old lady. "But look and see what the poor child has written, Renée."

Regina had just written a few words upon a slate that the faithful Landreau had taken care to place upon the table. Renée picked it up, and read aloud these words, which elicited from her an exclamation of surprise.

"If you think you can spare me now, I will go to Saint Germain and bring M. de Saint Senier back with me."

"Poor child, her devotion exceeds her strength. I should never forgive myself if I consented to expose her to the danger of such an undertaking," remarked the countess.

Regina was watching the old lady's face intently, and she must have divined that her generous offer was declined, for eagerly seizing the slate she again began to write with feverish haste, Mlle. de Saint Senior had risen, and was now leaning over the young girl's shoulder, reading each word as she traced it.

"What does she say?" asked the countess.

"'You need have no fears,' " read Renée, "'the Prussians will not harm me. I know their language, and I will pretend that I visited their lines merely to follow my business as a fortune-teller.' "

"She might succeed," murmured Mme. de Muire, "but really can not allow her to risk her life a second time for Roger."

"Besides, even if she should succeed in getting through the lines, how could she manage to bring him back, wounded, and even dying, as he is, perhaps," said Renée.

Sobs choked her utterance.

"As to that, mademoiselle," interrupted the old game-keeper, "I saw the lieutenant fall, and I am as sure that he received only a wound in the head as I am that I killed the Prussian who inflicted it. These scalp-wounds either kill or cure very quickly, and I am sure that Monsieur Roger will be taken from the hospital and sent to Germany in a few days."

"And who knows if we shall ever see him again?" sobbed Renée.

Mme. de Muire was silent for a few moments.

"No, no," she said at last, "if any misfortune should happen to the child I should reproach myself until the end of my days. Besides, it would grieve me too much to see her resume her old life, even to save my nephew. Make her understand that I am strongly opposed to this plan, and that we also need her to complete the work she has so well begun."

So Mlle. de Saint Senier dried her tears and wrote:

"It is impossible. Your services are needed here."

Regina glanced at the words, and hung her head sadly, but her bosom heaved with suppressed emotion, and her hands trembled violently as she replaced the slate upon the table.

"How she loves him!" murmured Mme. de Muire, who was watching her with close attention.

Renée lifted her still tearful eyes to her aunt's face.

"No more than you do, I know, my dear child," said the old lady, smiling gently, "but really, I am proud that our Roger can inspire such devotion."

"He is so good!" murmured Mlle. de Saint Senier.

"As good as he is handsome," added the countess. "His resemblance to the portrait of your great uncle, Colonel de Saint Senier, is very striking. You will have a charming husband."

"I have thought only of his heart," said Renée, blushing.

"Good looks are not to be despised, by any means, my child," said the lady, who cherished the ideas of the First Empire upon this subject; "but I think, with you, that Roger has many other merits, and as soon as this dreadful war is over we will celebrate the marriage upon my estate in Burgundy."

"The future looks very dark," remarked Mlle. de Saint Senier, sadly.

Her aunt took her hands, and was about to reassure her, when she suddenly exclaimed:

"But the child is ill. Quick, Landreau, some water and my bottle of smelling-salts on the mantel."

Regina had indeed turned frightfully pale, but she seemed to conquer her weakness by a violent effort of the will; the blood returned to her cheeks, and she motioned to them that the faintness had passed.

"The child is worn out with fatigue," said Mme. de Muire, "and must have rest. I will not allow her to run about the streets, and spend her nights in watching any longer. We will take her place, if need be. Landreau, show her up to the room we have prepared for her; we, my dear Renée, had better go up to the white chamber."

Regina had risen from her chair, but seemed to be absorbed in profound thought; nevertheless, she allowed herself to be embraced by Mlle. de Saint Senier, and mechanically accepted the arm Landreau offered.

"You can all retire to rest with tranquil minds, Madame la Comtesse," said the old keeper; "I make my nightly rounds as regularly as if the garden on the Rue de Laval was the park at Saint Senier."

The old man conducted his charge with almost paternal care to the door of the room that had been prepared for her.

"Good-night, beautiful child," he said, kindly, as he ushered her into the room. "Pleasant dreams. Be sure not to open the blinds."

The room in which Regina found herself was long and narrow, and must have been formerly occupied by a man, for several fowling-pieces were hanging on the wall.

A hanging of antique tapestry divided this sort of gallery, which had been transformed into a sleeping apartment, and on the high mantel, directly in front of this hanging, was an old-fashioned mirror in a heavily carved frame.

The windows opened upon the garden, for the room was on the first floor, but the carefully closed shutters inter-

absorbed every ray of light and cut off all communication with the outside world.

Neither *Mme. de Muire* nor *Mlle. de Saint Senior* had noticed that the young girl had taken away with her the portrait of *Roger*, which was lying on the table beside the slate, but such was the case, and no sooner had the young girl been left alone than she began to contemplate it with rapt intentness.

Her face seemed transfigured, and her air of resignation gradually gave place to one of firm resolution. Her eyes sparkled with wonderful brilliancy, a faint flush overspread her pale face, and the slight form became more erect, as if its owner were nerving herself to confront approaching danger.

Soon she drew from her bosom a medallion that she kissed several times, and then again directed her attention to the young officer's portrait. Her lips moved, as if she could indeed speak, and soon big tears began to roll down her cheeks.

After a few moments of silent contemplation she dropped upon her knees and began to pray.

She remained a long time with her head upon her bowed hands, that were resting upon a table on which the faithful *Landreau* had placed some books and writing materials; then she slowly rose and walked to the window, which she opened, after taking care to place the candles in such a position that the light would not be seen from outside.

The night was dark, and a fine rain was hurled by the westerly wind straight into the face of the young girl as she leaned out to look down into the garden.

There was nothing moving in the open space that surrounded the cottage which *Valnoir* had so often scrutinized from his window. The silence, too, was profound, for that night the batteries gave forth no sound. The beleaguered city seemed to be resting after the recent battle, and the *Prussian* artillery had not yet opened fire.

A brief survey of the little lawn and the lonely walk reassured Regina. She hastily returned to the table, and, without taking time to seat herself, she wrote upon a large sheet of paper the following lines:

"Forgive me for disobeying you, but I am going. I must save him or die. If you do not see me again in five days, pray for me, and think sometimes of one who loved you and who deems herself happy to be able to give her life for you."

After signing this with the name of Regina she stood there motionless for a moment. It seemed very much as if she was inclined to add her surname, but she threw away her pen, and shaking her head as if to drive away some thought that had just occurred to her, she rose and stepped to the mantel where the candles were still burning beside Roger's portrait. But as she extended her hand to pick up this picture which she intended to place upon her heart as a talisman against the Prussian bullets, she paused as if petrified.

In the glass she saw a man standing behind her.

She tried to cry out, but she had not time. Before she could utter the inarticulate sound peculiar to deaf mutes, she was seized about the waist by two strong arms. At the same time another man concealed behind the tapestry sprung upon her, and stuffed a handkerchief into her mouth.

The attack was so sudden and so unexpected that Regina was thrown down and gagged before she could make the slightest resistance. One of the assailants took advantage of the first opportunity to blow out the candles, and in the complete darkness that suddenly enveloped the room, the sense of vision, the only one now at her disposal, became useless to her.

She closed her eyes, and prepared to die.

"Raise her, and quickly," whispered the wretch who had first attacked her

● "Wait until I get the note she just wrote," replied the other.

"What do you want of that?"

"It may be of service to us by and by."

"Make haste then, that fool of a soldier may come before we have time to get away."

Both scoundrels seemed to realize the necessity of immediate action, for Regina was lifted and borne toward the window.

"Did you succeed?" asked a voice from the garden.

"Yes, citizen."

"Then drop your prize and come down."

Regina was lowered into the arms of the accomplice stationed below; the others leaped down upon the grass without making the slightest noise, seized their victim, and hustled her off.

It was darker than ever; the wind was blowing with increased violence, and the inmates of the cottage must have been asleep, for no light was visible, nor could one hear the slightest sound.

The scoundrels seemed to know their way perfectly, for turning the corner of the piazza they entered the walk bordered with lindens, and soon reached the gate. They must also have been familiar with the means of opening it, for one of them had only to touch a spring before it slowly turned upon its hinges.

The Rue de Laval was entirely deserted, but in the dim light of a distant street-lamp one could just distinguish a carriage at the corner of the Rue des Martyrs.

"I will run on ahead to let them know you are coming," said the man who had stood guard in the garden.

From the moment of her capture Regina had not made a single movement, and it seemed more than likely that fright had killed her, for her arms hung inertly at her sides, and her disheveled head rested heavily upon the breast of one of the bandits.

With a few rapid strides they reached the waiting carriage, where the person who seemed to be the leader of the expedition was holding the door open.

"Put her in," he said in a gruff voice.

In the twinkling of an eye the young girl found herself in the interior of the vehicle, between two guards who would evidently shrink from nothing to prevent her escape.

In a moment the other man, who had given his orders to the coachman, sprung in, and the carriage started in the direction of the park formed by the intersection of the Rue de Laval and the Rue de Bréda.

"Well, my boys, this is what I call quick work," remarked the leader.

"We have been lucky, I must admit," growled one of the subordinates. "To find the kitchen door open, the stairs carpeted so as to deaden all sound, and a hanging in the room to conceal us was certainly luck, indeed."

"To say nothing of the fact that we had to deal with a girl who can neither speak nor hear."

"Our task is not completed, recollect," remarked the leader of the expedition, laconically.

"That's a fact, Monsieur Taupier. What are we to do with our prize?"

"Didn't Frapillon tell you?"

"Not he. He says go, and we go. We are not in the habit of asking any explanation of him, I can tell you. We are going to take her to some safe place, I suppose."

"You are right, Mouchabœuf."

"But where are we to find it?"

"You will see in a quarter of an hour, if we continue to get over the ground at this rate."

On leaving the Rue de Laval the vehicle turned into one of the outer boulevards and drove in the direction of La Villette.

It was long past midnight, and in this lonely neighborhood only some belated drunkard would be seen prowling

about at this hour of the night, especially as the barracks recently constructed for the accommodation of the country militia were not occupied that night, by reason of the sortie of the morning.

Regina still maintained a statue-like immobility, and had it not been for her quick breathing one would have supposed her dead.

"As she keeps quiet I think we might remove the handkerchief," remarked one of the men.

"It's not worth while, for we are nearly at our journey's end," replied Taupier, as the carriage turned to the right and descended a steep hill leading to the canal. The pavement had become very rough, and the clumsy old vehicle jolted its occupants roughly about. On the right were occasional one-story houses, separated by wooden palings or by long gray walls. On the left was the bank of the deserted canal, for war had put an end to all navigation, and the boatmen and the keepers of the locks had taken their guns, and were now guarding the ramparts.

In a few minutes Taupier rapped violently on the glass, and the carriage stopped.

"Here we are!" he remarked. "Open that door on your side, Mouchabeuf; get out, and prepare to take the fair damsel we are going to hand you."

"I think we had better get out of the other door," was the reply. "We won't have so far to carry our burden then, for there is nothing but the canal on this side."

"Do what I say, without arguing," retorted the hunchback. "We are only losing time."

Mouchabeuf obeyed. Taupier followed him, remarking to the other man:

"Remain here, and see that the girl doesn't move until I come back. Come with me," he added, taking Mouchabeuf roughly by the arm.

"Lead on!"

The hunchback stepped nimbly over the iron chain that

separated the street from the wharf, and walked straight to the edge of the canal. The deep black water was almost on a level with the wharf; there was not a boat near, nor a single light in sight.

J. B. Frapillon's emissary watched the movements of his chief with evident uneasiness.

"Make haste now," said Taupier, suddenly. "Go back to the carriage, and help your comrade to bring our prisoner down here. Go, I tell you; have you become as deaf as the girl?" he added, impatiently, seeing that his subordinate made no movement to obey.

"I hear what you say," replied Mouchabeuf, quietly, "but before I go for the girl I should like to know what you intend to do with her."

"What business is it of yours? I don't mind telling you, however. The girl is tired, and I am going to give her a chance to rest down there," said Taupier, sneeringly, as he pointed to the canal.

"I suspected as much."

"So much the better. You escape any unpleasant surprise. But make haste, I don't like my plans hindered."

"This one will never be carried out," replied Mouchabeuf, coldly.

"And who'll prevent it, I should like to know?" demanded the hunchback, threateningly.

"I will."

"I must be dreaming. Were you or were you not hired by Frapillon to assist me in ridding myself of a young girl who is in my way?"

"Let us come to an understanding. I was hired to assist in abducting a young girl, but not in murdering her. There was nothing said about that, and I don't intend to have anything to do with such a crime."

"Oh! I understand you. You think you haven't been paid liberally enough, and you want me to offer you something additional. So be it! There's nothing mean about

me, and I'll tell your employer to give you one thousand francs instead of five hundred. Come now, start!"

"Neither for one thousand nor ten thousand," replied Mouchabeuf, shaking his head. "I've no desire to end my days on the guillotine."

"Capital punishment will soon be abolished, you idiot! I advocate its immediate suppression every evening in my paper."

This assurance did not satisfy Mouchabeuf, however.

"Possibly," he rejoined, coldly, "but in the meantime I've no intention of leaving this vale of tears. I'll assist you, however, in putting the girl anywhere you like except in the canal."

"I can put her in there without any of your help, you egregious fool," exclaimed Taupier, frantic with anger. "Your comrade is not so scrupulous, and I am sure of the coachman. Take yourself off, and the sooner the better. We can dispense with your services."

As he thus gave vent to his passion the hunchback started toward the carriage, but Mouchabeuf, instead of accepting his dismissal, followed him, and reached the vehicle almost at the same instant.

The coachman had left the box and was standing beside his horses, and the man who had remained in the carriage was dividing his attention between the still motionless Regina and Taupier's movements.

"Come, my man, are you willing to lend me a helping hand?" asked the hunchback.

"If I can," replied the coachman, in drawling tones that revealed his Norman origin. "What is wanted?"

"I want the girl taken from the carriage and carried a few yards. I'll attend to the rest, and there will be fifty louis to divide between you two, as this coward deserts us."

"That will be fifty pistoles apiece, then," muttered the coachman, evidently tempted.

"And I pay cash," added Taupier, rattling some gold coins in his pocket.

"That would certainly be an inducement," remarked the driver, without committing himself, however.

Mouchabeuf stood watching the conclusion of this horrible bargain in silence. He had folded his arms upon his breast, and seemed to be reflecting.

"Why do you refuse to have any hand in it?" inquired his comrade from the carriage.

"Because I've no desire to lose my head in the first place, and in the second place, because I know our employer, and he never said a word to me about it. He told me to find the girl, and I found her; when I discovered where she was he told me to abduct her, and I did abduct her, but not a word did he say about drowning her in the canal."

"What! do you think he knows nothing about it?"

"If you want my advice it is to have nothing more to do with the affair."

If Regina heard this ominous conversation she must be endowed with marvelous self-control, for she did not move, and the man who held her did not even feel her shudder.

As for the hunchback, he was half frantic with rage. He felt that his prey was about to escape, and he racked his brain to find some argument to overcome the scruples of his assistants.

"My children," he began, in a paternal tone, "I had no idea you could be so foolish, but you are sensible fellows, after all, and I am going to take the trouble to convince you that it is too late for you to draw back now."

"It is never too late to avoid Article 302," muttered Mouchabeuf, who knew every word of the penal code by heart.

"True, but do you, who are so familiar with the application of the death penalty, know what constitutes complicity? Suppose, for instance, that we should take the girl to Frapillon's house or to mine, and find a way to get

rid of her without your assistance, do you think, oh, learned lawyer! that the abduction in which you have just had a hand will be much to the fancy of any judge of instruction who is called upon to investigate the matter?"

This argument, to which the hunchback had already had recourse with Valnoir, produced its effect in this instance as well.

"But, Monsieur Taupier, is it absolutely necessary to put the girl out of the way?" asked Mouchabeuf.

"I did not go to all this expense merely to keep her to look at."

"But can't it be managed in some other way? What if she should be placed in some safe place of confinement. Wouldn't that answer your purpose just as well?"

"Yes," he replied ironically, "especially as those hussies at the cottage would be sure to discover her whereabouts some fine morning and set her free. You had better look out for the penal code, then, my dear Mouchabeuf."

"But there are plenty of private insane asylums, and we should have no difficulty in passing her off as a lunatic with her moon-struck ways and her rolling eyes."

"Oh, that mode of procedure has become too common. Besides, one of these days, the Prussians will take Charenton, and set all the lunatics free," retorted the hunchback, laughing at his atrocious jest.

Mouchabeuf scratched his head in evident perplexity. Taupier did not give him any more time for reflection.

"Well, my boys, the matter is settled, isn't it?" he asked, turning to his other companions.

The coachman nodded his assent, and the other man offered no objection.

"Then the sooner we finish the job the better. You must have a rope in the carriage, driver."

"Yes, under the front seat."

"Well, hand it to me. I shall have to do all the work myself, it seems."

The girl was securely bound in the twinkling of an eye, for she offered no resistance, knowing that it would be worse than useless.

"Now pick her up, and carry her to the end of the wharf," said Taupier, when the operation was successfully concluded.

The wretches obeyed.

The poor girl managed to clasp her bound hands; her eyes were lifted to Heaven. She was praying.

"Here, this is a good place," said Taupier, leaning over the edge of the canal.

Mouchabeuf had silently watched these preparations without taking any part in them, however, but his former scruples now began to assail him with increased vigor. Either Taupier's eloquence had failed to convince him, or the sight of the victim's beauty and resignation had touched even his hard heart.

"You shall not kill her!" he exclaimed, suddenly, throwing himself between his more ferocious comrades and the hunchback, who was leaning over the black water like a vulture over a freshly made grave.

Taupier sprung forward and seized him by the collar, but Mouchabeuf was a vigorous man, and he easily freed himself from his assailant.

"You shall pay for this, scoundrel!" cried the panting hunchback. "I will make Frapillon dismiss you, and if you don't starve to death I'll find some other way of getting you under ground."

The other men hesitated, but finally deposited their burden on the wharf.

"Excuse me for opposing you, Monsieur Taupier," said Mouchabeuf, "but it is for your own sake as much as ours; besides, I'll wager my head that my employer had no idea that the affair was to end in this way."

The hunchback ground his teeth, but said nothing.

"I have a plan, and I think a very good one," remarked

Mouchabeuf, "and if it doesn't please you I'll say no more, and you can do as you please."

"Speak quick, then."

"It is not for the pleasure of killing her that you want to drop the girl into the canal, is it?"

"No."

"It is merely to get her safely out of the way, and to prevent the ladies at the cottage from ever seeing her again?"

"Yes."

"Well, I can tell you a way to accomplish that without running a risk of anything worse than six months imprisonment. Why can't she be quietly sent to some country from which she would never return?"

"The dead are the only persons who do not return."

"But India or China would answer just as well as the grave, it seems to me."

"It would take too long to get her to Havre or to Nantes. I would rather ship her by way of the canal," added the villainous wretch.

"She could go by land to the place where I would send her."

"And where is that?"

"To Prussia."

"Are you mad, or are you only making merry at my expense?"

"Neither."

"Go to the devil! I've had enough of your plans."

"Will you listen to me or not?"

"No, I'd rather let the girl go and be done with it. She would return to the cottage and denounce you, and you would be caught like the fool that you are, while I can get out of the scrape by leaving Paris in a balloon."

"No one will be caught if you will let me manage the affair. You have been to Rueil, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the condition of affairs there now?"

"I know there was fighting there this morning."

"Yes, but usually Rueil is neutral ground, and one can talk with the Prussians as safely and quietly as we are talking here."

"I don't care if we can, and if that is all you have to say to me—"

"Let me finish, and then you can decide. During the twenty years I have been working I have saved some money, and I have invested it in that locality. I am extremely fond of fishing, and when there is nothing for me to do in Paris I—"

The hunchback fairly stamped with impatience.

"I merely tell you this," continued Mouchabeuf, "merely to explain how I come to be the owner of a sort of tavern and drinking saloon on the Bougival road, where I have had plenty of opportunities to make the acquaintance of the Prussians since the siege began, for I go out there at least three times a week to superintend my establishment and attend to Frapillon's commissions."

"Ah, ha, so Frapillon gives you commissions for the Prussians!"

"Oh, they're of a perfectly innocent nature, I assure you. I take them newspapers, for which they pay a liberal price. They give me theirs in return, and Frapillon purchases them of me, at a good round price I admit, still everybody gains by the operation."

"And where is this business carried on?"

"In my shop. Everything is very cleverly managed. Each army has its hours, so there is never any unpleasant meeting between the contending forces. When our men are there the Prussians are informed of the fact by their scouts, and there is no danger of their showing themselves; but as soon as our men go the Prussians come, and I tell you a whole quart of schnapps apiece has no terrors for them."

"All this is worth knowing," muttered the hunchback,

"and if Citizen Frapillon should ever become hard to manage—

"But I fail to see how your acquaintance with the Germans can be of any service to me," he added, aloud.

"It is very plain, it seems to me. You want to get rid of the girl, and if she never returns that is all you ask."

"Precisely."

"Well, I will hand her over to the Prussians, who will not release her, I promise you. I recently furnished them with two singers, who were immediately sent on to Saint Germain to adorn the stage of a concert hall there."

"But this girl is no singer."

"That makes no difference. I'll invent some story with the aid of a friend of mine, Corporal Tichdorf, of the Pomeranian Fusiliers. He's a fellow whose wits are wonderfully sharpened by the sight of a thaler or two, and I promise you that he will ship the girl so far that she will never trouble you again."

Taupier was listening now with the closest possible attention.

"And what guaranty have I that you will do as you propose?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"You can go with me, if you like, and witness the conclusion of the bargain. That will convince you that I am not deceiving you."

"But when and how do you expect to get to Rueil, especially burdened with such a piece of merchandise as this?"

"You need have no anxiety on that score. The gates of the city are closed now, but they will be opened again to-morrow morning at seven o'clock, and we can reach my place by noon."

"Unless the National Guards stop us on the way."

"I have a pass for three persons."

"But what if the girl should make a disturbance?"

"How can she, when she is dumb?"

"She might make signs to the persons we meet."

"Oh, we will take her there in the big covered wagon I use in transporting my merchandise. Besides, I am known, and if need be, I'll say that she is a crazy niece of mine."

"But won't we have to wait a long time after we get there?"

"No; they come always at night, and I have a good cellar where we can deposit the girl for safe keeping."

Taupier tramped up and down the wharf a few times.

"There seems to be no other way," he muttered between his set teeth. "These scoundrels would not obey me now."

"Come, you fellows, carry the girl back to the carriage. We'll take her to Mouchabeuf's rooms, and keep her there until the gates open in the morning."

The rascals needed no urging; the articles of the penal code had given them abundant food for reflection.

Regina was again placed in the carriage.

"I would have preferred the canal. It was the easiest as well as the safest way," growled the hunchback, as the carriage again started off.

CHAPTER VII.

MOUCHABEUF had told the truth.

His tavern was certainly the best patronized establishment in the village of Rueil during the siege. Not that the place was attractive in appearance; on the contrary, it would have been difficult to find one more unprepossessing. Constructed of odds and ends of material, the building was quadrangular in form, and only a story and a half high.

On the ground-floor, which was almost entirely occupied by a very large room intended for a public drinking-saloon, there was also a narrow hall, which the ingenious proprie-

tor had converted into a store, while two or three half-furnished rooms on the floor above could be used as lodgings for guests, if necessary.

Outside, the building was painted yellow, and adorned with dark-red blinds.

A tiny strip of garden, in which carrots and lettuce grew helter-skelter, completed the charms of this rural resort.

Nor was the popularity of the establishment due to the superior quality of the solids and liquids sold there, these being of a varied nature, but of execrable quality. The secret of the preference accorded it was due entirely to its location. Situated at the end, or rather in the outskirts of the village, between the French and Prussian outposts, the establishment was in an isolated position.

It had two doors—one opening into the road, and the other into the garden, which extended to the river. A deep cellar afforded a secure place of retreat, if necessary, and a cupola from which guests could be seen some time prior to their arrival.

In addition to the clandestine traffic he carried on for his employer, J. B. Frapillon, Mouchabeuf frequently furnished his countrymen with information obtained through German officers by means of presents of real Havanas and of genuine champagne of which he kept a secret supply.

In the proprietor's absence, the establishment was conducted by a young man about twenty-five years of age, who was famous alike for his strength and for his luxuriant locks, which reminded one of Samson, the conqueror of the Philistines, and who rejoiced in the name of Polyte.

On the day following Regina's abduction, Polyte had been as busy as busy could be from early dawn. The skirmish of the day before had brought a crowd of ambulance drivers and hangers-on, who did not fail to take a drink at Mouchabeuf's bar. The drinking-saloon and the shop had not been empty for a single moment, and though Polyte had achieved wonders, he was beginning to be at his

wits' end, and to bitterly deplore the absence of his master, who had not been there for several days, but whose arrival was momentarily expected.

Again and again he rushed to the door to look up the road in the hope of seeing Mouchabeuf's wagon approaching, but each time he was disappointed.

"It is certainly very strange," he said to himself. "It is after four o'clock, and the master has not come, though he must have heard the cannon yesterday, and know that I need him."

"Polyte, give us another drink all round, and make haste, you slow poke!" cried a chorus of husky voices.

"Coming, coming! You have had enough, in my opinion, but you must gorge yourselves, I suppose," muttered Polyte, as he prepared to do his customer's bidding.

The men who were making all this noise seemed to be sufficiently excited already.

There were five of them—all clad in an odd uniform consisting of sky-blue trousers, red sashes, a black jacket, gaudily trimmed with yellow braid, and pointed hats ornamental with a cock's feather.

They only needed a velvet mantle to realize the usual stage conception of Fra Diavolo.

Their fantastic costumes did not seem to embarrass them, however; and it was evident that they were thoroughly in earnest, though military discipline did not seem to be their forte, judging from the familiarity that characterized their intercourse with their commander, a stalwart fellow about forty years of age, with closely cropped hair, a dashing goatee and waxed mustache.

He did not disdain to drink with his men, and the only superiority he seemed to desire over them was in the number of glasses drained.

"To the health of the Lost Children of the Rue Maubuce," he cried, emptying, at a single draught, the glass Polyte had just filled.

The soldiers repeated the toast, accompanying it with a loud hurrah.

"Ah, my boys," continued the officer in the melancholy tone affected by intoxicated men, "if my advice had been heeded we should not have been beaten again yesterday."

"These brigadier generals, you see, are all good for nothing," responded one of the Lost Children, setting his glass down on the counter with an emphatic thump.

"An attack in force! an attack in force! That would be my plan," remarked their leader. "Put me at the head of three thousand brave men like yourselves to-morrow morning, and we would sleep at Versailles to-morrow night! Polyte, give us a rum-punch to cool our throats," he added. But Polyte was not listening.

He had heard the far-off rumble of carriage-wheels, and had run to the door.

"It is the proprietor!" he murmured, shading his eyes with his hand, "and he must have brought a big lot of provisions, for the wagon seems to be heavily loaded."

It was, indeed, Mouchabeuf's turn-out that was coming up the road, and that stopped in front of the wine-shop a few moments afterward.

"Come here, Polyte," cried the man as he jumped down from the front seat. "I've brought company. Come and help them out."

"All right, all right, sir! You did well to return this evening, sir."

"Why? have you a good many customers?"

"Five or six fellows now, that is all."

"Get them off as quick as you can. We shall have plenty of work on hand to-night."

"Yes, my fine fellow, come and unload," exclaimed Taupier. "As for me, I really must stretch my legs a little," he added, hastening to the house as rapidly as his misshapen limbs would permit.

"Why, here's a woman, and a pretty one, too!" exclaimed Polyte, as he let down the step.

Almost at the same instant a sullen exclamation resounded from Taupier, who had just found himself face to face on the threshold with the commander of the *Enfants Perdus*.

"Podensac! Zounds! what luck!" growled the hunchback.

"Taupier, by all that's holy!" exclaimed the captain.

The hunchback would have given a good deal to avoid this encounter, but it was too late.

"This is what comes of allowing one's self to listen to idiots!" he muttered, instinctively recoiling, as if with the intention of beating a retreat.

"What the devil are you doing here, and what have you got in that ambulance?" asked Podensac, laughing.

"I'll tell you presently," replied the hunchback.

Mouchabeneuf, who had witnessed the meeting, and instinctively felt that it must be a very disagreeable one for the person for whom he was just at that moment working, made an attempt to prevent Regina from showing herself.

He ran to the wagon, but he reached it too late.

The young girl had already placed her hand upon the shoulder of the complacent Polyte and leaped lightly to the ground.

She appeared not in the least alarmed or astonished.

During the long drive she had been freed from her bonds, and the handkerchief had been removed from her mouth—conclusive proof that her persecutors no longer distrusted her or feared any attempt at escape on her part.

"Oh, ho! I understand!" exclaimed Podensac, on perceiving Regina. "So you are something of a gay Lothario, after all?"

"Mind your own business!" replied the hunchback, roughly.

"Come, come, don't be angry, fond lover, but come and take a drink with me. There are only a few trusty friends

here, and you can bring your lady-love in with perfect safety."

"I'm not thirsty," replied Taupier, who was trying to devise some plausible story, but could find none, to explain this trip to Rueil, in company with a woman.

"But surely I'm not mistaken," cried Podensac, suddenly. "That pretty girl you have with you is certainly our old acquaintance of the forest of Saint Germain."

The hunchback made a horrible grimace, but said nothing.

One can not think of everything, and in the first moment of surprise he had entirely forgotten that the captain and Regina had met under circumstances that were not likely to be forgotten.

The situation was becoming more and more complicated, and the astute Taupier began to wonder if it would not be best to take Podensac into his confidence, at least partially.

The dashing Podensac had formerly served in the regular army in the capacity of second lieutenant, and had even played a very creditable part in several brilliant campaigns, for his bravery was unquestionable, but unfortunately on returning from the Crimea he had been appointed treasurer of his regiment.

This appointment proved his ruin, as sundry errors in his accounts soon led to his dismissal from the service.

After this downfall, the former lieutenant had practiced several branches of industry, the most honest of which was certainly that which had brought him in close relations with Taupier, and it was merely to the fact of a slight acquaintance formed at the outposts that he owed the honor of having served as M. de Saint Senier's second. . . .

"I understand now," said Podensac, with a knowing wink; "you have taken a fancy to the girl, in the first place, because she is as pretty as a picture, and in the second place, because she is dumb. You have no gossiping to

fear, and that is a great inducement to a politician like yourself."

The hunchback concluded it would be better not to undeceive his friend than to make any dangerous revelations, especially as Regina would have neither the opportunity nor the power to contradict this version of the case. As for Regina, she was walking slowly to and fro, without evincing the slightest fear or embarrassment, and the hunchback, who was furtively watching her, congratulated himself upon the resolution he had just formed, while Mouchabeuf, seeing Taupier chatting gayly with Podensac, thought that they must understand each other perfectly, so with Polyte's assistance he began to unload the wagon.

Taupier resolved to carry out the rôle of lover which had been thus unexpectedly forced upon him. He approached Regina and gallantly offered her his arm to escort her to the house, but not without uttering these significant words as he passed Mouchabeuf:

"Come in as soon as you have finished, and get these people off as soon as possible."

The entrance of the ill-assorted couple was greeted by loud acclamations on the part of Podensac, who had reached that state of intoxication at which one feels positively obliged to make a noise.

"And now, my children," cried the gallant captain, "I have the honor to present to you Citizen Taupier, the famous journalist and his wife, a distinguished *artiste*. He is one of the editors of the famous 'Serpenteau,' but not a bit proud for all that, as he is going to do us the honor to drink with us. Come, Polyte, where is the punch we ordered?"

"Here it is," cried the young man, entering the room with an immense bowl of smoking punch in his hands.

The appearance of the beverage was greeted by lusty cheers, and Podensac, arming himself with a pewter ladle, began to fill the glasses.

Taupier accepted the portion offered him without any urging, and even carried his audacity so far as to offer a glass to Regina. That young girl had seated herself upon a bench, and her almost smiling face expressed none of the disgust that this bar-room scene must have excited in her breast.

She gently pushed away the glass, making signs that she was not thirsty, but she manifested no anger at the familiarity.

Her calmness began to astonish and alarm Taupier, whose suspicions were invariably aroused by anything he could not understand.

"What a pity it is that she can't talk," remarked Podensac, in a whisper aside to his friend Taupier. "I should like to ask her what became of the acrobat, and what adventures they met with while they were bringing Saint Senier's body to Paris."

"I thought that you returned to the city with them."

"No, only as far as Rueil, where the Uhlans came very near catching us. There I left them to rejoin my men, who were stationed near Colombes."

The young girl had manifested no surprise on seeing Podensac, but she had kept a close watch of him, and seemed to be following his words by the movement of his lips.

Just as the captain of the Enfants Perdus expressed his regret at not being able to question her, she drew from a satchel suspended from her belt a quantity of small ivory blocks, and spread them out on the table in front of her.

"Look, an alphabet!" exclaimed Podensac. "We shall be able to talk after all."

"Let her alone," cried Taupier, angrily. "She is not very strong, and I don't want her annoyed."

"What a fool I was not to have thought of this," he added, mentally.

While he was trying to catch Mouchabeuf's eye, and make

signs to him to get rid of the sharp-shooters immediately, Regina rose, walked straight up to the captain, took his left hand, and began to scrutinize the lines in the palm,

"Delightful! delightful!" exclaimed Podensac, bursting into a boisterous laugh. "She is going to tell my fortune!"

"She is mad!" growled Taupier.

The turn the affair had taken was certainly strange enough to arouse the hunchback's astonishment.

As they neared Rueil Taupier had fancied that the prisoner's face brightened, and that her eyes shone with greater brilliancy, but he rather inclined to the belief that fright had affected the mind of his victim; and though he felt a slight uneasiness on perceiving Podensac, he no longer doubted that Regina had become insane when he saw her scrutinize the captain's palm.

In the meantime the young girl had drawn the dashing officer toward the table on which she had spread her alphabet, and had made him seat himself beside her on one of the wooden benches that took the place of chairs in the establishment.

Podensac allowed himself to be thus led, and seemed to find his situation very amusing. His men shared his delight, and gathered around the pretty fortune-teller, exchanging jests of a rather questionable character.

Taupier alone seemed out of sorts, and his clouded brow testified that he still felt some distrust of Regina.

"Even confirmed lunatics have their lucid moments," he said to himself, "and I certainly wish this fool of a Podensac was a thousand miles off."

He glanced at the door to see if Mouchabeuf was not about to make a welcome diversion, but he was probably busy at the stable, and Polyte was too much occupied in serving his customers to pay any attention to what was going on.

"Now let us hear what you see in my hand," said the captain, straightening himself up proudly, for Podensac

was always inclined to pose in the presence of a woman; besides, the idea of exciting the hunchback's jealousy was not displeasing to him.

Regina did not seem to notice the movement, however; she was examining with profound attention the lines in the soldier's brawny hand.

She was either in earnest or playing her part very cleverly, for the expression of her face underwent a marked change as she proceeded with her examination.

She had begun smilingly, but her face gradually clouded, and at last she suddenly dropped the hand she was holding as if she had discovered some ominous mark upon it.

"Ah, well, what says the book of fate?" asked Podensac, laughing.

The girl leaned one elbow upon the table, and shook her head with a gloomy air.

"Come, use the alphabet," continued the captain, tapping the ivory blocks with the tips of his fingers.

Regina gazed at him searchingly, as if to ask, "Do you insist?"

At least the officer so understood it, for he replied, with an energetic gesture in the affirmative:

"Come, come, my dear, go on! I'm a regular old war-horse, and you needn't be afraid to tell me anything you please."

The young girl began to finger the blocks with wonderful rapidity, and as she did so Podensac exclaimed, almost involuntarily:

"Whew! there are taper fingers and pink, almond-shaped nails for you! Taupier, you certainly are a clever rascal."

But it was not at Regina's aristocratic hand that the hunchback was looking. He was gazing anxiously at the letters she was arranging in line upon the table, and asking himself:

"What is she going to say to him?"

As the letters were one by one placed in line by the girl's slender fingers, Podensac spelled out the words:

"You—will—some—day—wear—six—strips—of—gold—braid—on—your—sleeve."

"A general—I am to be a general!" the captain cried, straightening himself up. "Ah, well! that is not impossible, and I see no reason why you should put on such a doleful face, my little beauty! But there seems to be a postscript," he added, seeing that the girl continued to busy herself with the letters.

"But you will die a violent death," were the words next formed under Regina's fingers.

"That prospect is less cheering," said the future general; "but, nonsense! even if a bullet does put an end to one's life in fifteen years or so, such rapid promotion as you promise me makes it worth while to run the risk. But that is not all, it seems," he added, watching the girl's fingers.

"In less than a year—"

"*Sacrebleu!* that's a short time. I sha'n't have a chance to save much of my salary."

"Unless—"

"Ah! so there is a proviso! I shouldn't be sorry to live a little longer. Unless what?"

"This week—you save—the life—of—some one." And after forming these words Regina paused, and cast a meaning look at Podensac.

The scene was certainly a strange one.

The citizens of the Rue Maubuée, in spite of their admiration for Voltaire, were, in their secret hearts, not without superstition, so they were watching the different phases of their commander's horoscope with evident interest.

As for Taupier, he was still rather in doubt as to the real character of this sorcery, and wondered whether Regina was trying to devise a way to escape from his clutches, or whether she was really bereft of reason.

Fortunately for him, Mouchabeuf entered just at that moment, and read the strange prediction upon the table.

The two scoundrels exchanged a glance that said plainly: "It is time to put an end to this performance."

"Save the life of some one," repeated Podensac. "I'm sure nothing would please me better provided it isn't the life of a Prussian."

The deaf and dumb girl certainly could not have heard this remark, and yet the hunchback fancied she answered it with a slight shake of the head.

"Let the girl alone," he said, rising hastily. "She has a sort of mania for her former profession, and I don't like it, for it often excites her so much as to make her really ill."

"One moment, gallant Taupier, and then the consultation will be ended. Only tell me who I am to save."

"Captain, it is time for you to go," interposed Mouchabeuf. "I have already been taken to task several times for allowing soldiers to remain here later than seven o'clock, and I don't want my establishment closed by the police."

"Don't be alarmed, my friend. I've no intention of spending the night here. Just let me see what the fair fortune-teller has written, and I'll be off."

"The person—you must—save—is the lieutenant."

The reading was interrupted by an exclamation from Mouchabeuf, who had just stepped to the door.

"*Mille tonnerres!* here is a squad of Prussians," he exclaimed.

These words were the signal for a general scattering.

The Enfants-Perdus ran for their guns, and Podensac drew his sword.

"I will have no fighting in my place," said Mouchabeuf, firmly. "Make your escape through the garden. Polyte will show you the way."

"True, we are not in force," murmured the captain,

following his men who were already hastening toward the back door.

Taupier, who had not lost his wits, leaned over to see the words the girl had formed, but she swept the letters into a little heap by a quick movement of her hand, then rose and retreated to a corner of the room.

"What are we to do?" inquired the hunchback, eagerly.

"Remain where we are. They are the Pomeranians I spoke to you about. I know them, and we have nothing to fear."

"But how about the girl? Shall we let them see her?"

"No. I have changed my mind. She is too cunning, and I think we had better follow the original plan."

As he spoke he stooped and touched a board in the floor.

A trap suddenly opened beneath the very feet of Regina, who disappeared, uttering a loud cry.

"Did you hear her scream?" exclaimed Taupier, horrified, not at the girl's fate, but at the sound she had just made, and its possible consequences.

"All deaf mutes can scream, and the Prussians are too far off to have heard her," remarked Mouchabeuf, consolingly. Since their arrival at the yellow house the proprietor had displayed much more *sang-froid* than the leader of the expedition. In the first place the boastful Taupier was really an arrant coward, and the clear proximity of the enemy had a rather demoralizing effect upon his mental powers.

Mouchabeuf, though really not much more courageous, had the great advantage of being upon his own territory; besides, all the carefully laid plans of the hunchback had been deranged one after another by a series of unforeseen accidents.

The trap-door after its fall slowly returned to its place, and it was only necessary for Mouchabeuf to again press the spring for the flooring to become firm.

Thanks to this ingenious contrivance and the door open-

ing into the garden, Regina and the sharp-shooters had disappeared with the rapidity of lightning, leaving no other trace of their presence than some half-empty glasses and the alphabet on the table.

"Heaven grant that drunken fool of a captain will find his way out!" muttered the proprietor. • He is quite capable of losing it, and running right into the midst of the Germans."

He had scarcely uttered these words when a shrill whistle resounded.

"That is Tichdorf inquiring if the way is clear, and that scoundrel Polyte has not returned."

The young man thus unjustly accused reappeared at the very instant his master uttered his name.

"They got off safely," he said, breathlessly. "I went with them to the turn of the road, and told them to keep quiet."

"Very well, run out, and give the signal for the corporal to bring his men in."

Polyte rushed out with a haste that spoke ill for his patriotism; but he had not time to go far, for the Prussians' footsteps were already resounding in the paved court-yard.

"Here they are!" cried Mouchabeuf. "I am going to pass you off as my nephew. Tichdorf is very suspicious, and it may make him uneasy to see a stranger."

Taupier felt strongly disposed to decline this impromptu relationship, but it was too late to offer any objection.

A face adorned with long yellow mustaches, a flat nose and a greasy cap had just appeared in the door-way, and this unprepossessing physiognomy belonged to a Pomeranian soldier, who slipped into the room with all the caution of that prudent race.

He was followed by another exactly like him in appearance; then by another, and yet another, and in less than a minute a dozen of King William's fusiliers had entered the room.

These men resembled one another so closely that only a practiced eye could distinguish one from another.

The corporal was the only exception to the rule, and his appearance was well worth studying.

Tall, slender, and fair-haired, and formed consequently upon the same model as nearly all natives of Northern Germany, he was the possessor of an oval face and Grecian nose, that contrasted strongly with the coarse features of his men.

His uniform, too, was much more neat, and his carefully trimmed whiskers showed that he took much more pains with his toilet than was usual in the Prussian camp.

"Good-day, Father Mouchabeuf," he began in French, and without the slightest accent, "is there any chance of our warming ourselves with two or three glasses of brandy?"

"Certainly, Monsieur Tichdorf," replied the proprietor, cordially. "You know very well that my cellar is at your disposal."

"Your cellar? hum! I have never seen it, you old fraud!" replied the corporal, laughing; "but provided you bring up a couple of quarts of '36 for my men, and a bottle of good wine for me to drink with you, I sha'n't trouble myself about the contents of your cellar."

Taupier listened in amazement, for this foreigner's French would have done honor to a native born Parisian, and he already began to feel a vague uneasiness.

The allusion to the cellar made his blood curdle in his veins, and he began to balance himself first upon one foot and then upon the other to conceal his embarrassment.

While this conversation was going on, the soldiers had seated themselves, and with that instinct of self-preservation that never deserts a Prussian, they had ranged themselves in a semi-circle, facing the door, their guns between their legs, and the table in front of them to serve as a barricade, if necessary.

Tichdorf had placed himself astride a stool in front of his men, and was lighting an immense pipe.

"You have company to-day, it seems, Father Moucha-beuf," he remarked, as he sent a puff of smoke up into the air.

"Yes. This gentleman is my nephew, who came here this morning with an ambulance, and who is going to spend the night with me."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the corporal, with an incredulous air. "I could have sworn that I had seen this gentleman at the Bourse or at the Café de Suède."

"At the Bourse," repeated Taupier, more and more disconcerted.

"True!" exclaimed Tichdorf. "It must astonish you to see a man who is familiar with the Café de Suède commanding barbarians who were vegetating in the swamps of Koenigsberg three months ago."

"No," exclaimed the bewildered hunchback; "but I must confess—"

"It can be very easily explained, however, my dear sir," continued the good-natured corporal; "when the war broke out I was a clerk in the employ of a broker on the Rue de Richelieu, and I expect to return there when all this nonsense is over. But how about the cognac, Father Moucha-beuf? Are we to get it to-day or to-morrow?"

"I can't imagine what that good-for-nothing Polyte is doing; I'll call him."

Tichdorf said a few words in German, to his men, while the proprietor shouted lustily for his factotum.

There was no response.

"I shouldn't be surprised to find that the fool had gone to Malmaison in search of dead horses," growled Moucha-beuf, for Polyte had been carrying on quite a lucrative business in the sale of horse-flesh for some time past.

"Why, here's an alphabet!" exclaimed the corporal, suddenly. "Are there any children about?"

Taupier was about to reply when a singular noise made him start.

Some one seemed to be rapping upon the floor beneath their feet.

The Prussians sprung up and glanced anxiously around them. The corporal alone seemed unmoved, but his face suddenly assumed an expression of malevolent curiosity.

"Did you hear that?" he asked, looking the hunchback straight in the eyes. "Can it be that there are ghosts about your establishment, Father Mouchabeuf?"

"It is the wind, corporal," replied the proprietor, with evident embarrassment.

"The wind—down in your cellar? Nonsense! You can't make me believe that, you old humbug!"

"But I assure you, Monsieur Tichdorf—"

"Look here," interrupted that gentleman curtly, "it is very evident that there are Frenchmen here. That is as plain as the nose on one's face, and if you think of playing any trick upon me and my men you had better say so, or I'll have you shot this very second—you and this gentleman here who is no more your nephew than I am the son of old Bismarck."

"Oh, Monsieur Tichdorf, you certainly would not treat an old friend like that!" faltered Mouchabeuf, who had turned very pale.

"It is well to take one's precautions, especially as I have no desire to return to Paris as a prisoner of war. It would interfere too much with my operations at the Bourse."

And turning, the corporal gave his men some brief orders in the German tongue. It was not necessary for a person to be familiar with that language to understand that he had advised them to be on their guard, for the Pomeranians instantly seized their weapons.

Two of them stationed themselves at the door opening into the road; two others placed themselves at the foot of

the winding staircase, and Tichdorf stepped up to the hunchback.

The latter was beginning to heartily curse the weakness that had placed him in this perilous position, and he cast terrified glances at the soldiers whose manner was by no means reassuring, for the non-appearance of the brandy had put them in execrable humor, and they were rolling their eyes wildly about and gnawing their long mustaches furiously.

"Now, Father Mouchabeuf," resumed the corporal, tranquilly, "let us proceed more systematically. The sound came from your cellar, and I suppose the corks of your champagne bottles scarcely pop as noisily as that."

"It is certainly Polyte. The scoundrel must have broken something," said the proprietor, delighted to have found a tolerably plausible explanation at last.

"Still another falsehood, my friend. If it was Polyte, he would have been up here before this time. It strikes me that the hour has come for you to make the tour of this famous cellar with me, if only to see if your stock of brandy is complete."

Poor Mouchabeuf nearly fainted on hearing this direct invitation. Even in ordinary times he guarded with zealous care all approach to this cellar, in which he stored his provisions and liquors, but this evening the prospect of such an invasion was a thousand times more frightful.

The idea of bringing Regina in his friend Tichdorf's presence was all the more appalling to him, as his plans in regard to her had undergone an entire change. When he first took her under his protection, on the bank of the canal, he supposed her well-nigh an idiot, and he had based his hopes of personal safety principally upon his victim's infirmity. But since he had witnessed the scene with Podonsac, he had become entirely of Taupier's opinion, and he thought now only of getting her safely out of the way as soon as possible; and to show her to the corporal, especially

after the personal violence to which she had just been subjected, was to expose himself to a very dangerous charge. The alphabet was still on the table, and the girl had shown that she knew how to use it.

"Come," said the Prussian, "show my men the way."

Mouchabeuf did not move.

"Shall we not have the pleasure of your nephew's company on our underground excursion?" asked Tichdorf, maliciously.

It was the hunchback's turn to tremble now.

He had, in fact, been cutting a sorry figure for the last quarter of an hour, however. His gorilla-like hands were continually traveling to his forehead to wipe away the sweat that was oozing from every pore, and his crooked knees tottered under him. He, too, realized that the corporal would not be a safe confidant, and to speak seemed to him even more dangerous than to be silent.

"Well, what are you going to do?" insisted the relentless corporal.

"I—I haven't the key to the cellar," stammered Mouchabeuf.

"Bah! Where is it?"

"Polyte took it when he went to get the brandy, and—"

"And Polyte has mysteriously disappeared, of course?"

"He must have gone to the place where they were fighting yesterday. If there is a horse killed anywhere within a league of here nothing will do but he must start out after it."

"Father Mouchabeuf, you must have a very poor opinion of my mental powers, if you think that I will swallow any such yarns as these you have just been spinning for my benefit. I warn you that I've had enough of them, and that I'm going to take my men away. Your brandy would cost us too dear."

"As you please, Monsieur Tichdorf," replied the proprietor, greatly relieved; "but I give you my word of honor—"

"Only before I leave I intend to take my precautions," continued the implacable corporal, motioning his host to be silent. "You must understand that, though I like to drink a glass of wine, smoke a good cigar, and read a paper here, I can not expose myself to any danger of being taken prisoner. That being the case, you must make way for some one else."

"Make way for some one else!" repeated Mouchabeuf, in the utmost bewilderment.

"Yes; give up your establishment and all it contains to somebody else."

"I—I don't understand you," murmured the wretched host.

"It seems to me that I make my meaning very plain, however. Suppose, for instance, that you and your nephew should have a stroke of apoplexy this evening, and that the authorities of Rueil should come to verify the report of your sudden decease, what would happen?"

"But we are not ill!" exclaimed Mouchabeuf, vehemently.

"Possibly not; but we are all mortal. Would not the result be that the aforesaid authorities would place another tavern-keeper here, with whom I could speedily arrive at an understanding, and who would not try to play any tricks upon one? You see I should be greatly the gainer by the stroke of apoplexy referred to."

"You must be jesting, Monsieur Tichdorf," said the host, huskily.

"Not at all, as you will soon see," replied the implacable corporal.

And he gave an order in German to his men, who instantly collared the two Frenchmen and pushed them up against the wall.

"You are not going to shoot us, I hope?" cried Taupier, struggling violently, but vainly, against his captors.

"That is it precisely, my dear sir," replied Tichdorf.

"But it would be infamous! I protest against such an outrage!" yelled the hunchback.

"What else can you expect? I had confidence in your uncle, but that is all gone now; besides—"

"Monsieur Tichdorf, I swear to you, by all that is most sacred, that there is no one in the cellar," gasped the terrified Mouchabeuf, "and—"

The unfortunate man did not finish the sentence, for he was interrupted by three still more violent blows upon the floor.

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed the corporal. "You see, I have no time to lose.

"Load!" he added, turning to his men.

The order was promptly obeyed.

"Mercy, mercy!" yelled the hunchback and Mouchabeuf in the same breath. "We will open the cellar."

"Open the cellar," repeated Tichdorf, with a diabolical smile; "but what good will that do if there is no one there?"

"But there is," replied Mouchabeuf, who had lost his wits so completely that he no longer knew what he was saying.

"Yes, yes; there is a woman in the cellar!" cried the hunchback, hoping this confession would save him.

The soldiers stood with weapons ready, and only one more word was needed to dispatch the two wretches to another world; but the corporal seemed to take pleasure in prolonging their sufferings.

"A woman," he said, shaking his head; "the sharp-shooter's *cantinière*, probably."

"No; I swear that it is not, Monsieur Tichdorf," faltered Mouchabeuf. "It is a young girl, and she is really very pretty."

"Impossible!" cried the corporal, with an incredulous smile. "What! there is a pretty girl in the house, and you have concealed the fact from me? That is certainly

very inconsiderate in you, Father Mouchabeuf, when you know that I have a weakness for a pretty face!"

"You shall see for yourself."

"No; I haven't time," retorted Tichdorf, "and I am an idiot to stand here fooling with you, when the sharpshooters may be upon us at any moment."

And he again turned to his soldiers.

Taupier suddenly fell upon his knees, and Mouchabeuf clasped his hands, crying, imploringly:-

"Forgive me! Have mercy upon me! The cellar is empty, and I will conduct you through it myself."

"Mouchabeuf, my friend, you are always singing the same song, and it is becoming tiresome."

The Pomeranians still held their loaded guns in their hands; some had even raised them to their shoulders.

But the corporal, instead of giving the order to fire, continued, in a drawling tone:

"Besides, it is useless to talk of opening the cellar, as you say that Polyte took the key away with him."

"But—"

"There is no but about it. I have no intention of running after your boy, or of waiting for his return, so we had better end the matter here and now."

Mouchabeuf uttered a positive shriek of terror.

"There, there!" he tried to articulate, pointing to the corner of the room.

"Well, what of it? Is there a secret door leading down into the cellar?"

"No, it is a trap-door," said Mouchabeuf, with great difficulty, for the words seemed to stick in his throat.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Tichdorf, bursting into a coarse laugh. "A trap-door! Why, your establishment is arranged like the stage of a theater. I have good grounds for my suspicions, it seems. Still, I am a good-natured fellow, as you know," he continued, "and I should like to investigate the matter further, if only to gratify my curiosity."

Where is this famous trap-door? In that corner, I suppose?"

"Yes; I will show it to you."

Mouchabeuf advanced a few steps, then stooped and pressed a spring. The trap-door fell instantly, disclosing the void below.

Tichdorf leaned cautiously over the opening, but saw nothing.

"Here is the trap-door. That is something, I admit, but now, where is the woman?"

"Down in the cellar."

"If you suppose I am going down in search of her only to find myself and my men in a trap, you are very much mistaken, Mouchabeuf."

"But—"

"Call the girl, you idiot! If she is alive she'll come, for she can't find it very pleasant down in that hole."

"But she's deaf and dumb."

"A very clever excuse that, but it won't go down with me. I want to see her, and at once, even if she's blind into the bargain. Your nephew is going down to fetch her, and if he has not returned at the end of five minutes I shall have you shot and then set fire to the house."

"He will return within that time, Monsieur Tichdorf, I assure you that he will," replied Mouchabeuf, plucking Taupier by the sleeve, as if to beg him to make haste.

The hunchback, in spite of the wholesome terror which the loaded rifles inspired, seemed greatly averse to exploring the gloomy depths below. He knew nothing about the arrangement of the cellar; besides, he feared to meet his victim there.

"I—I don't know the way," muttered Taupier, despairingly.

"You can jump down. There's a mattress there," hastily answered the proprietor, who was equally averse to making this exploring expedition.

"Come, come, go ahead, my dear sir," urged the corporal. "You will be perfectly safe, as your uncle assures us there is a mattress there for you to jump upon."

"And a ladder to come back by," added Mouchabeuf.

The unfortunate hunchback was certainly in a sorry plight between the gulf yawning at his feet and the bayonets threatening him in the rear.

But he had decided to make the venture, and leaning over the opening, he had already assumed the attitude of Curtius ready to leap into the gulf, when an unexpected apparition made him hastily recoil, for from the gloom that filled the cellar gradually emerged the lovely head and shoulders of Regina.

"So you told the truth for once!" exclaimed the corporal.

Strange to say, Mouchabeuf really had not told a falsehood for an hour, and what he had said about the mattress and the ladder was perfectly true.

The trap served two purposes.

In case of necessity the proprietor of the establishment could thus vanish from sight, not only instantaneously but safely.

Once in the cellar he had only to press a spring for the door to return to its place, and he could then either remain there until all danger was past, or make his escape through a cellar door that opened into the garden.

If, on the contrary, it became necessary to rid himself of an intruder or an enemy, the trap was worked in the same way, but it was only necessary to remove the mattress to make the fall exceedingly dangerous.

This last case being most rare, the mattress was almost always in place, and on this particular evening the proprietor had taken neither the time nor the precaution to remove it.

The Pomeranians, though not very impressionable, recoiled in surprise and almost terror from this lovely form,

which gradually rose from the void as if lifted by an invisible spring, and Mouchabeuf and Taupier gazed at each other with undisguised anxiety. Tichdorf alone appeared wholly unmoved, and stepping forward he offered his hand to Regina with as much ease as if he was merely inviting her to waltz.

"I am rejoiced to see that your sojourn in that gloomy hole has not impaired your beauty, my fair lady," he said, in his most gallant tones.

"She can neither hear nor speak," Mouchabeuf made haste to say.

The girl led the corporal toward the table. There she seated herself, and instantly began to form the letters which were lying there into words.

"What is she going to say to him?" thought the two scoundrels.

"Why, it is German," said the corporal.

Mouchabeuf and Taupier exchanged glances of consternation. Neither of them understood the language of the Prussians, and their dismay imparted a most comical expression to their countenances.

The scene that had just occurred in the presence of Podensac was now repeated, with this difference, the two culprits could understand nothing of it.

Tichdorf began to spell:

"*Vollen Sie mich nach Saint Germain fuhren?*" (Will you take me to Saint Germain?)

"To Saint Germain!" repeated the corporal. "That's a droll idea, certainly."

Then he added, in German:

"*Ju wohl.*" (Yes, certainly.)

"She can't understand you," said Mouchabeuf.

Still the nod of acquiescence that accompanied the corporal's response must have satisfied the girl that her request would be granted.

But what was the request? That was exactly what

Taupier and his accomplice longed to know, but they dared not question the Prussian for fear of seeming too inquisitive, and thus exciting his suspicions.

Two French words, and the only ones that had appeared in the sentence composed by Regina, had struck them both very forcibly, particularly the hunchback. She had made some allusion to Saint Germain, that was evident, and this fact was well calculated to arouse Taupier's anxiety.

The countenance of the young girl brightened when she found that Tichdorf was willing to comply with her request. She immediately began to manipulate the letters again, and her nimble fingers soon formed these words:

"Ich danke Ihnen. Lasst uns gehen." (I thank you. Let us go.)

She had scarcely completed the sentence before she rose, and her manner plainly indicated both gratitude and a desire to start at once.

The corporal motioned her to reseal herself, saying to her softly, in French:

"Presehtly."

"She has asked him to take her away. That is very evident," thought Taupier.

An examination seemed imminent.

Tichdorf was scrutinizing the countenances of Mouchabeuf and his friend, and they could hardly hope that he would go away without demanding an explanation.

Mouchabeuf had already prepared his story, and the hunchback was trying hard to invent some plausible tale.

The great difficulty was to arrive at a mutual understanding without speaking to each other, and the two scoundrels found themselves very much in the situation of two culprits who are brought before a magistrate without having had any opportunity to confer with each other.

"Who is this young girl?" the corporal at last asked, dryly.

"I was just going to tell you, Monsieur Tichdorf," re-

plied Mouchabeuf, stammeringly. "She is a relative of my nephew's."

"What is she doing here, and why did you hide her in the cellar?"

"Why, you see, she is very pretty, and here, in a tavern, frequented by all sorts of people—of course, I am not alluding to you or your men—but those sharp-shooters of ours have no respect for anything—so—"

"Very good; but all this doesn't explain how you came to bring her here, and the very next day after a battle, too, when a young and pretty woman has no business gallivanting about the outposts."

Mouchabeuf gave Taupier a quick glance that said as plainly as any words:

"Pay attention now, and hear what I'm going to say."

"Ah, well," he exclaimed suddenly, with the air of a man who has decided to make a painful confession, "I have great confidence in you, and I am going to tell you all."

"Go on, then, I am in a hurry."

"Well, the state of the case is briefly this. The girl is of highly respectable parentage, a relative of my nephew, as I said before, but she has turned out badly."

"What! a deaf mute? You astonish me," said Tichdorf, ironically.

"Oh, she's as cunning as a fox, and she knows how to make herself understood, as you saw for yourself just now. She has given her parents no end of trouble. Would you believe it, she even ran away from home to go roaming about the country with a circus performer?"

"All this is certainly very remarkable," observed the corporal, incredulously.

"Yes, upon my word!—with a sort of clown who taught her to tell fortunes and play all sorts of tricks. Her parents were highly incensed, of course, and they sent her

to me in the hope that I should be able to bring her to her senses."

"So I suppose it was to punish her that you shut her up in the cellar?"

"Exactly; but I had no intention of leaving her there. Good heavens! no; I have a room upstairs for her, and in about a fortnight, after my nephew and I have talked to her and reasoned with her, we shall send her back to her father, though, to tell the truth, I have very little hope of reforming her. The acrobat she is so infatuated with is in Paris, and he is quite capable of enticing her away again. If her parents would listen to me they would do with her exactly what they would do with a young man when he seems likely to be anything but a comfort to them; send her out to the colonies."

"That would be a rather difficult matter just at this time," remarked the Prussian.

"True, and we shall be obliged, of course, to keep her as long as the siege lasts. Ah! any one who took her off our hands would be doing us a great favor."

While Mouchabeuf was uttering this long string of falsehoods Regina sat with one elbow resting upon the table, while she toyed abstractedly with the ivory blocks. Taupier, on the contrary, was listening with all his ears to the story invented by his accomplice. The beginning pleased him greatly, but the tavern-keeper's last remark spoiled everything.

This direct invitation to the Prussians to take the girl away with them was a terrible mistake in his eyes, for the hunchback, more discerning than his subordinate, was beginning to suspect the truth.

He would have paid handsomely for an opportunity to take Mouchabeuf aside and counsel him, but it was too late.

"Fool that I was!" he thought, biting his finger nails. "Why didn't I pitch them both into the canal?"

"So her relatives would like to get rid of her?" inquired the corporal. "Are they rich?"

"Well, no," replied Mouchabeuf, a little nervously. "They are in tolerably comfortable circumstances, that is all."

"Very well, then it is a bargain. You are to give me two thousand francs, in gold, understand, and I'll take the girl away with me."

"Two thousand francs. Why, I haven't that amount here, Monsieur Tichdorf, and I sha'n't be able to get it for you until after I have seen her parents."

"Nonsense! you old fraud! Don't say any more to me about her parents. Why, here's your nephew. I am sure he has a pocketful of napoleons, and he certainly will not let such a good opportunity slip for the sake of a few shillings."

As he spoke the corporal turned to Taupier, who found himself in the most trying situation conceivable. Though sure now that his accomplice had made a mistake, he could not contradict his statements without deeply compromising himself.

He attempted to extricate himself from the dilemma by evading the question.

"I haven't the money about me," he faltered.

But even as he spoke he betrayed himself by a gesture, for without even knowing it, he raised his hand to his breast-pocket as if to protect the plethoric purse there, for the hunchback, being as miserly as his friend Valnoir was extravagant, he invariably carried all his worldly possessions about with him.

"Fudge! that's all nonsense!" said Tichdorf. "Look carefully in your pocket, and I am sure that you will find the trifle I ask for there."

"No, I assure you," stammered Taupier, who was choking with rage.

"Would you like two of my men to aid you in the ex-

amination of your waistcoat-pocket?" asked the corporal, with a diabolical grin.

On hearing this proposal the hunchback started as if he had stepped upon a serpent. The bare idea of Prussian hands in his pockets made his hair stand upon end.

He saw that he had better submit to the inevitable.

"On reflection," he muttered, "I believe that I can. I had forgotten that, only this morning, a sum of money was paid me, and—"

"I felt sure that we should come to an understanding eventually, my dear sir," said Tichdorf, holding out his hand for the money.

Taupier, with frightful contortions of visage, drew two rolls of gold from his pocket, and handed them to the dread corporal with a sigh so deep as to strongly resemble a groan.

"Very good!" exclaimed the Prussian. "I will take the young woman away with me, and I promise you that her family shall not hear of her again for some time."

Regina was ready. Tichdorf gave an order to his men, who formed into line on either side of the young girl, and he then departed at the head of the *cortège*."

The two scoundrels looked at each other in blank dismay.

"It cost you considerable," remarked Mouchabeuf, as soon as the corporal was out of hearing, "but we are at least rid of the creature."

"Fool!" cried Taupier, in a furious passion, "you did exactly what she wanted you to do. You have sent her to Saint Germain to rejoin the man who may ruin us all."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE roofs were covered with snow, and a freezing north wind was playing havoc among the withered leaves of the lindens on the Rue de Laval.

A man was slowly walking up and down the sidewalk in

front of the gate through which Taupier's band had passed on the night of Regina's abduction, six weeks before.

Surmounted by a hat of pyramidal form, and enveloped in a green overcoat several inches shorter than the blue coat beneath it, this peculiar-looking individual was the very type of the undisciplined 'National Guard so common toward the close of the siege; still, by his gold-bound spectacles and white cravat, a resident of the neighborhood would have instantly recognized in him Citizen Bourignard, the *concierge* of a large house on the Rue de Navarin.

Just at that moment the street was absolutely deserted. The clocks of the city had just struck nine, and a large crowd of people was still standing in line in front of each butcher's shop, each person patiently awaiting his or her turn, armed with the card that the municipal government had issued to each household.

Still, the dignified *concierge* was not alone. Around him gamboled an urchin clad in a sailor suit that seemed to have been dragged through the gutter, so thickly was it covered with mud and dirt.

The boy's pale, sharp face was nearly concealed by an immense broad-brimmed hat that came down over his ears, so little could be seen except his tongue, which was incessantly poked out, and as quickly withdrawn whenever the sentinel turned.

This ironical grimace, too, was all the more reprehensible from the fact that it was addressed to the author of his being, for the urchin was none other than the youthful Agricola, son of the virtuous Bourignard, a *concierge* by trade and a Jacobin by vocation.

In honor of the famous Gringalet, who was to disable all the enemy's batteries at a single shot, his father had purchased for him a blue flannel suit lavishly adorned with gold anchors, but this gorgeous attire had effected no radical change in the habits of Agricola, who continued to play truant from school and to hang about the neighboring barracks.

In speaking of his heir-presumptive, Bourignard always remarked that he had the instincts of a wild horse of the plains, and in his education he had adopted the theories of Jean Jacques Rousseau, his favorite author.

The natural consequence of this was that Agricola was regarded as a blockhead at school, and as a perfect torment in the neighborhood in which he lived.

It was rarely, indeed, that this child of nature consented to accompany his father, but on this particular occasion the *concierge* doubtless had good reasons for dragging his indomitable offspring along in his wake. Pausing in his walk, he finally planted himself directly in front of the wall that concealed the cottage from sight, and began polishing his glasses with feverish activity.

"Strange to say, this inclosure seems to have no other outlet than a knobless door," he said to himself. "I really do not see how I am to perform Citizen Taupier's commission."

This soliloquy was interrupted by the shrill voice of his son who began to sing at the top of his voice a refrain then very popular in the rather uncultured region of Belleville.

"Bismarck, if you persist,
Of the whole Prussian army there'll remain not one."

"Enough!" exclaimed Bourignard, with an imposing gesture. "The song is patriotic, but unseasonable just at the present time."

"Unseasonable, unseasonable!" mocked the *garçon*, with the true faubourg drawl.

"Yes, my son; unseasonable, inasmuch as I am charged with a confidential mission, and do not wish to arouse the suspicions of the aristocrats who dwell within these walls."

"Of the whole Prussian army there'll remain not one," continued the irreverent Agricola, in still more piercing tones.

"I must gain an entrance by strategy," continued the

dignified porter, "and it was to assist me in this difficult undertaking that I brought you here. I trust, Agricola, that you will justify my confidence."

"Your confidence! I'd rather have a six sous piece."

"And you shall, if you will find a way of effecting an entrance into this feudal abode for me."

"And what's a feudal abode?" inquired the charming child, all the while jumping up and down in a mud puddle.

"It is the dwelling-place of the upholders of tyranny, my son."

"I don't understand," sneered the *gamin*.

"This wall you see here shelters enemies of the people, to say nothing of the fact that it incloses ground which would be much better employed if homes for the laboring-class were constructed upon it."

"And a porter's lodge, eh, papa?"

"As to the garden behind it, it would nourish twenty families if planted with vegetables."

"I don't care anything about all that," cried Agricola, who never hesitated to interrupt his respectable parent's discourses. "What have I got to do to earn six sous? that's what I want to know."

"I want to speak to a person of the male sex degraded enough to serve the two aristocrats who reside in this cottage."

"Oh! that old fellow in the green coat? I know him! I gave him a kick yesterday, as he was coming out of the grocer's shop. If you want to see him, why don't you ring the bell?"

"You are young, my son, and you don't know the wiles of the aristocracy," replied Bourignard, gravely. "In the first place there is no bell, and even if you rapped all day nobody would open the door. These people are conspirators, and to gain an entrance into their abode one must know the signal."

"Oh, must one?" sneered the boy. "You just wait a second and I'll give them a signal."

And, picking a stone up out of the mud, the young rascal pitched it over the wall with so much skill and force that they could hear it strike the roof of the cottage.

"Now glue yourself to the door, papa, and you'll see the result presently."

"That boy has a master mind, unquestionably," muttered Bourignard, as he executed the maneuver described by his ingenious heir.

There was no response to this rather peremptory summons, but Agricola was persevering, and three or four more projectiles described the same curve, and fell upon the cottage roof.

After four or five minutes of this exercise, the young scapegrace had the unspeakable satisfaction of seeing the door open a few inches, and a gray head peer out.

This was the moment that young Bourignard had been waiting for.

Another stone, skillfully directed, struck the legs of the imprudent man, who had just appeared in sight, and the promising child started off on a run toward the Rue des Martyrs.

"You shall pay for this, you young rascal!" yelled the man, fiercely, pulling the door to behind him, and darting off in pursuit of the offender, without even noticing Bourignard.

Landreau, for it was he who had been lured to the spot by Agricola's *ruse*, did not take time to reflect, unfortunately, for it would certainly have been much better for him to have re-entered the house; but the stone had bruised his knee, and not being of a particularly patient disposition, he could not resist the desire to punish the offender, and began the chase with the same ardor he would have displayed in pursuing a poacher through the forest of Saint Senier.

But Agricola was a good runner.

By the time Landreau reached the corner of the street the young imp was rounding the corner of the Avenue Turdaine, and the old gamekeeper, having had time to become calmer, decided that it would be wiser to abandon the chase, especially as he was bare-headed, and clad in the old green jacket which was so out of harmony with the rest of his attire.

This in itself was enough to attract the attention of passers-by. Besides, a man who is running is always regarded with suspicion, and Landreau's odd costume and excited manner were instantly remarked by the citizens who were standing in line in front of a butcher's shop near by.

"Look at that old man running!" cried one.

"He must be a thief!" exclaimed another.

"Stop him!" shouted a third.

"Stop thief!" yelled a fourth.

Such exclamations as these resounded on every side, and an ominous excitement was apparent in the crowd.

Two of the National Guard, stationed there to preserve order, stepped out from the group to check the old man's progress. Landreau decided that by running away he would only increase the excitement; besides, he had the best of reasons for not desiring to attract any soldiers to the cottage, so he quietly awaited the approach of the guard.

"Whither are you going in such hot haste, citizen?" inquired one of the men.

Before Landreau could find an answer quite a little crowd had gathered around them, and a small deformed man, who by a vigorous use of his elbows had succeeded in securing a place in the front row of spectators, asked, authoritatively:

"What's the matter here?"

"I don't know yet, Citizen Taupier," exclaimed one of the soldiers. "This fellow was running at the top of his speed, and he must have some reason for it."

"I'm inclined to think that he's a deserter," said the hunchback. "Look at his blue trousers."

"That is true!" cried the soldiers and civilians in concert.

"I'm no deserter," cried Landreau, energetically.

"Then how does it happen that you have on the regulation trousers?" demanded Taupier.

"What business is that of yours, bandy-legs?" retorted the gamekeeper, whose late experience with Agricola had quite exhausted his stock of patience.

"Citizens, I call upon you all to witness that this man refuses to explain his strange conduct," cried the hunchback, "so there must be something wrong."

"But what right have you to question me? I don't know you, and I have no desire to know you."

"That is very possible, but I speak in the name of the people, who have a right to know all," replied Taupier, in the impressive tones he usually reserved for his speeches at the political clubs.

"Yes, yes; he must answer," shouted the crowd.

"One doesn't run like that when one hasn't been doing anything wrong," remarked an old woman laden with an immense basket.

"I'll bet he's from Brittany," remarked a by-stander.

"It's false! I am from Burgundy," exclaimed Landreau, carried away by local patriotism.

"That amounts to the same thing," yelled a *gamin* who had no regard for geography.

"Do you belong to the *gardes mobiles*, yes or no?" asked a by-stander, who seemed much more sensible than those around him.

"I am too old for that," replied the gray-headed gamekeeper, evasively.

"Then you have no right to wear a uniform. The illegal wearing of a uniform constitutes a criminal offense," said one of the guards, who must have formerly been employed as clerk in a lawyer's office.

"Citizens, this man is certainly a suspicious character," remarked Taupier, gravely.

"He should be arrested," added the old woman. "I am satisfied of that."

"Certainly. There's no doubt of it! To the station-house with him!" shouted the crowd, which had greatly increased in size.

The new-comers could not see what was going on, and shouted only from a spirit of imitation, but those in the middle of the circle were becoming more and more unfriendly to Landreau.

"Why do you want to take me to the station-house, pray?" asked the old man, forcing himself to appear calm.

"To teach you to answer when you are spoken to, you old fool," yelled an exasperated citizen.

"It's enough to make one's blood boil to see these vagabonds loafing about the streets while my poor husband, a sergeant in the 61st, is nearly dead from standing guard at the bastion every day," growled the owner of the big basket.

In crowds, as well as in debating societies, there is always a conservative element, and in this case it found a spokesman in the proprietor of a neighboring grocery store.

"Perhaps the poor old man is not in the army after all," ventured this well-meaning personage. "I think it would be much better to take him to his home, where he would have a chance to prove his identity than to drag him to the station-house."

"No, no; it would be much better for him to explain to the proper authorities," cried Taupier, to whom this contradictory proposal was eminently unwelcome.

"Does he live near here, it would save trouble. What do you reside, citizen?"

Landreau opened his lips to reply, but the thought of the dangerous crowd to the cottage made him sudden and he said nothing.

He blushed, stammered a little, and finally made this most imprudent response:

“It’s none of your business, and I’m not going to tell you.”

“Do you hear that, citizens?” yelled the triumphant hunchback. “He absolutely refuses to answer. And he must have his reasons, of course.”

The by-standers were all of one mind now; all united in clamoring for his arrest, and the two representatives of armed force present could no longer hesitate to obey the rather boisterously expressed will of the sovereign people.

After exchanging a hasty glance they stepped a little closer to the old gamekeeper, and one of them remarked, in an insinuating tone:

“Come, citizen, it is better to go of one’s own accord than to be obliged to yield to force.”

But before they could place their hands upon his shoulders Landreau bounded back and clinched his fists, while his face expressed such a firm determination to defend himself that a space was instantly cleared around him, and the two members of the National Guard, now thoroughly frightened, turned their bayonets upon him.

This imprudent act only increased Landreau’s exasperation, and suddenly hurling his assailants aside with the quickness of lightning he tore the gun from the hands of one of them, and assumed a defensive attitude.

This resolute act created the utmost alarm in the throng, which opened before him with a celerity that furnished conclusive proof of the marvelous elasticity of crowds in general.

A second before a child could not have found standing room, yet the bit of sharp iron had suddenly opened a passage-way wide enough for three men, and Landreau lost no time in availing himself of this opportunity for escape.

“Murder! murder! Death to the assassin!”

These and similar cries resounded behind him, and the more courageous among the crowd started in pursuit of the fugitive.

The old servant had taken good care not to run in the direction of the cottage, but toward the Avenue Trudaine, and the first moment of surprise having given him a start of about fifteen yards, he felt strong hopes of eventually distancing his pursuers if he could only reach some of the small streets and lanes that lead down to the outer boulevard.

But he had not made due allowance for Agricola. That young scoundrel, whose attention had been attracted by the crowd that gathered around Landreau, had retraced his steps, and though he had not deemed it advisable to mingle with it—imitating in this the example of his worthy parent, who had quietly returned to the Rue de Navarin—he stationed himself at the corner of the avenue to enjoy the fun.

When he saw Landreau turn his steps in that direction the idea of arresting the fugitive's progress instantly occurred to him, and as the poor gamekeeper turned the corner the young imp ran between his legs and threw him flat upon the ground.

He had not time to rise. Before he could get upon his feet again he was seized by a dozen strong hands, disarmed, and tossed about like a bale of merchandise.

Further resistance was useless, and Landreau did not even attempt it.

Taupier, though not much of a runner, had rejoined the party as soon as his distorted limbs would permit, and now assumed the command.

"Citizens!" he said, impressively, "this man is evidently a great culprit, and there can be little doubt that this is one of the cases in which the people should take the law into their own hands."

"Yes, yes, hang him to the nearest lamp-post! To the

river with him!" yelled the crowd, ferocious in its anger, and Landreau would have been killed on the spot if his persecutors had been armed.

"This way! this way, citizens!" cried Agricola, jumping up and down in fiendish glee. "I know a good place to hang the aristocrat."

A little further down the avenue stood the unfinished buildings of Rollin College, and Agricola's suggestion being enthusiastically received, the crowd took up its line of march.

In less troublous times a scene like this would have been impossible in the heart of Paris, but the state of unhealthy excitement that had so long prevailed in the city had wrought a complete change in the habits and manners of its inhabitants. The honest citizen who, before the war, had the word equality ever upon his lips, now talked only of imprisoning and shooting men without even the semblance of a trial. The female sex was, of course, peculiarly susceptible to the demoralizing influence of the privations and anxiety caused by the siege, and after three or four hours of waiting in front of a butcher's or grocer's shop, respectable mothers of families were transformed into positive furies.

Consequently the crowd by which the unfortunate Landreau was dragged along was composed, in a great part, of persons who were really very peaceably inclined in ordinary times. In fact, the feminine element preponderated. It is more than probable that these very persons, if they had found the gamekeeper starving on a street corner would have gone without food themselves to give him the ration for which they had waited, cold and shivering, in the snow; but a few cunning words then had all the power of those philters of the olden time which are said to have suddenly destroyed the reason of those to whom they were administered.

It was only necessary to call a man a traitor or a spy to

bring down upon his unhappy head the blind fury of the mob, and the hunchback, who knew the populace well, had availed himself of the means successfully employed by demagogues of every age and clime.

Guided by Agricola, who gamboled joyously along before it, the crowd finally entered the building in process of erection for the famous Rollin College.

The main door-way led into a large hall, which the architect had intended for a refectory. As yet only the four walls of the hall were completed, but the transverse beams intended to support the flooring of the story above were already in position.

The place consequently was well adapted to the perpetration of the intended crime, but unfortunately some of the necessary implements were lacking. They had no rope, and the beams were not within the reach of the would-be executioners.

Taupier began to fear that his plan would not prove feasible after all, especially as there were already some dissenting voices; but he had been plotting to get rid of Landreau for a long time, and had prepared this scheme with too much care to admit any possibility of failure now.

The advocates of drowning began to promulgate their views.

"This isn't a good place. Let us take him away from here," remarked one.

"Let us go to the Bridge Austerlitz with him," cried a second voice.

"No, that is too far."

"To the basin of La Villette then," shouted another.

"Yes, yes, that's a good place."

"Say, you people down there!" piped a shrill voice.

Every head was raised. There, astride a window frame twenty feet above them, was the puny form of Agricola. The worthy heir of Citizen Bourignard had climbed a ladder that led up to the scaffolding that surrounded one of

the towers, and thus reached one of the openings left for the window in the story above.

The carpenter had left several augers and hammers there, as well as several pieces of ropes, so Agricola had only to choose.

"Citizens, you will now see Blondin, the hero of Niagara," cried the young scoundrel, bowing low, with his hand upon his heart.

Shouts of laughter greeted this sally, and, highly elated by his success, the young imp, with arms outstretched to balance himself, walked out upon one of the ponderous beams until he reached the middle of the hall. Then seating himself astride it, unrolled the rope which he had coiled about his waist, and allowed an end to fall over each side of the beam.

"Now, citizens, the performance can begin whenever you please," he cried.

Quite a commotion was apparent in the crowd immediately surrounding Landreau. Some of the less ferocious drew back, with evident repugnance, while those who were more hardened began to prepare a slip knot.

During the whole of this trying ordeal the gamekeeper had retained his self-possession. He was very pale, but he carried his head proudly erect; and he had not uttered a word since his fall had placed him at the mercy of the crowd.

Besides, it was too late now to make any attempt to soften the hearts of these brutes, so he lifted his heart in prayer to God, and prepared to die.

The preparations were nearly completed.

Four impromptu executioners had already seized one end of the rope; the slip-noose had been made, and was now dangling about five feet from the ground.

The victim was pushed toward this hastily improvised gallows, and a man stood ready to place the fatal noose about his neck.

Taupier watched the frightful operation with dry eyes;

but several women, seized by a tardy attack of sensibility, suddenly rushed toward the door.

A moment more, and the victim would be launched into eternity.

Taupier, who had been longing for this moment with breathless impatience, saw, not without uneasiness, the women whom fright had just driven from the room rush back again.

"Here are the Mobiles! run!" they cried.

"Quick, quick, finish the job. Don't let the rascal escape you," yelled the hunchback.

But the volunteer executioners, being less interested in suppressing the gamekeeper, deemed it advisable to take time for reflection.

The mere announcement of the presence of an armed force in the immediate neighborhood was enough to render them circumspect in their behavior, and all let go their hold on the fatal rope.

Landreau's neck remained in the noose, but a space had suddenly been cleared around him, and as his hands were not bound, there was nothing to prevent him from freeing himself entirely.

A detachment of Finisterre militia chanced to be marching down the Avenue Trudaine on their way from the trenches just as the crowd of women rushed out into the street, shouting and gesticulating, and hearing such exclamations as: "They are going to hang him!" "They have hung him already!" "I hear his death rattle!" these soldiers, though extremely unsophisticated, could not doubt that some grave event was in progress within this unfinished building. Besides, the sergeant in command was a city bred man, and much more clear-sighted than his men, so he marched his little column straight up to the door of the college.

The return of the women had created great excitement, but the unexpected advent of the soldiers caused a regular

stampede, many leaping from the windows into the courtyard, while others took refuge in various nooks and corners of the building; and no sooner did the promising child of the *concierge* discern the soldiers, from the beam upon which he was perched, than he very wisely concluded that it was time for him to take his departure.

At that moment the hall certainly presented a curious aspect. The little Breton sergeant and his men had cut off all retreat by way of the Avenue Trudaine, and now stood gazing with very natural astonishment at the frightened populace and the preparations for the execution. Landreau still had the rope about his neck, and seemed deeply agitated, for as not unfrequently happens, the man who had confronted death without flinching was trembling now at the thought of the danger to which he had been exposed.

The hunchback was balancing himself first upon one foot and then upon the other, endeavoring to prepare a tissue of falsehoods in accordance with his usual habit in peculiarly trying circumstances.

“What is the matter, my friend?” inquired the sergeant, going straight up to Landreau, who did not know what to say in reply.

When one has only narrowly escaped being hung for speaking too hastily, one is naturally averse to entering into an explanation in a stranger’s presence, and the faithful servitor of the Saint Seniors understood perfectly that the affair was not ended by any means. He was saved from death, it is true, but not from the necessity of revealing his identity under penalty of arrest.

How was he to extricate himself from the clutches of the authorities without disclosing his name and the names of the inmates of the cottage.

His embarrassment did not escape the keen eye of Taupier, who deemed it advisable to lose no time in presenting his statement of the case.

"Citizen," he began, stepping boldly forward, "this man is a deserter; he assaulted—yes, he threatened the lives of the brave guards who tried to arrest him, and wounded several persons with a bayonet he snatched from one of the soldiers."

"A deserter? Why, he is too old for military service."

"But he is a deserter, nevertheless! He admitted it," cried two or three by-standers who were beginning to regain courage.

"Perhaps he is," replied the sergeant, "still that is no reason why you should hang him."

"The people have a right to punish traitors," said Taupier, dictatorially.

"I am not talking to you," said the young officer, who was beginning to take offense at the hunchback's arrogant manners.

"I repeat that we all owe obedience to the will of the people, citizen."

But if Valnoir's coadjutor fancied that he could intimidate the little sergeant, he was very much mistaken.

"The people!" he retorted, shrugging his shoulders, "do you call this rabble that combines to overpower and kill a defenseless man the people?"

"You are insulting worthy citizens!" cried Taupier, "and I hold you responsible for whatever may be the result of this interference on your part."

"Very well, I know what I'm about. Now let me hear your side of the story," he added, turning to Landreau.

"I was seized as I was passing quietly down the street," replied the old gamekeeper. "Of course I defended myself, as well as I could, but I was thrown down, and then dragged here. If you had not arrived with your men when you did, I should be a dead man now."

"And you are not in the army?"

"Not now," replied Landreau, with a hesitation that betrayed his embarrassment.

"Your explanation is hardly satisfactory, and I shall be obliged to take you before the provost-marshal," said the sergeant, after a moment's silence.

Then, turning to the by-standers, he added:

"Any of you who desire to appear as witnesses have only to follow me, and as to that man there, who seems to be the chief cause of all this trouble, I shall take him with me."

He pointed to Taupier as he spoke, and not one of the crowd that filled the hall dared to make the slightest protest.

This announcement was anything but pleasing to the hunchback, who was not at all anxious to appear with Landreau before the authorities, for it would be necessary to state his name and business, and his position as editor of the "*Serpenteau*" was not of a nature to secure him the good-will of the provost-marshal, upon whom this sheet poured the grossest vituperation daily.

He realized, however, the impossibility of resisting a command that was upheld by a dozen bayonets, especially as he could hope for no aid from his cowardly followers.

"I am perfectly willing to accompany you," he said, more civilly; "but it is hardly worth while to trouble the commandant, especially as there is a military post only a few steps from here."

The sergeant glanced down the avenue.

It was snowing hard, and the tramp to the Place Vendôme was no slight undertaking for men already worn out with cold and fatigue.

"Where is this post?" inquired the sergeant, anxious to spare his men if possible.

"On the Rue Neuve Bossuet, only a few steps from here."

"Let us go there then, and at once, for it is terribly cold here."

Taupier required no urging, and Landreau, too, obeyed the order without making any objection.

'I don't know which battalion is on guard to-day,' thought Taupier, "but it will be very strange if I don't find some member of the 'Society of the Moon with the Teeth' there, and in that case, all will be well."

They reached the post just as the officer in charge opened the door of his office to go to breakfast, and Taupier gave a sigh of relief upon recognizing in the functionary his old friend, J. B. Frapillon.

The prudent hunchback had the presence of mind to give no sign of recognition, however, and Frapillon was shrewd enough to take in the situation at a glance.

"Walk in, gentlemen," said Frapillon, with the politeness that never deserted him, for it was one of his pet theories that violence and injustice could be made to appear excusable only by suavity of manner.

The sergeant pushed his prisoner and the witnesses into the guard-room, and then followed them, leaving his men outside, however, for he knew by experience that the Finistère militia was not popular with many of the National Guards.

The room was filled with men whose ferocious and disreputable appearance fully justified the sergeant's precautions. Some were chaffing one another about the stove; others were smoking short black pipes and playing cards. The whole atmosphere of the place was impregnated with nauseating odors, which even the strong smell of tobacco-smoke could not overcome, and which must have been exceedingly disagreeable to one of J. B. Frapillon's fastidious tastes, so he lost no time in ushering the new arrivals into the apartment reserved for the officer in charge.

It was a narrow room, furnished with a pine table and a few cane-seat chairs.

Frapillon seated himself with the easy grace of a man accustomed to giving audiences behind a desk, settled his spectacles on his nose, stroked his sandy beard, and began the examination with all the suavity of which he was capable.

Strange to say, though the party accused and his accusers found themselves simultaneously in the presence of the official to whom the settlement of the difficulty was intrusted, there was no recrimination or noisy discussion.

Landreau and Taupier both had their reasons for being silent, especially as the latter had full confidence in the sagacity of his accomplice, Frapillon; consequently, the sergeant was able to finish his statement of the case without interruption.

After this was concluded, Landreau complained of the violent treatment to which he had been subjected, but refused to disclose either his profession or his place of residence.

This certainly was one of the worst possible systems of defense, but he could think of no other, as his relations with the military authorities were unfortunately of a very unsatisfactory nature just at that time.

After the capture of his lieutenant during the nocturnal attack, the old servant obtained permission to return to Paris; but his leave had expired, and a request for its renewal had been refused. Hence, it followed that Landreau, an excellent soldier, but above all a devoted adherent of the Saint Senior family, found himself in a very unpleasant position, as, during the six weeks that he had been at the cottage serving the ladies, his name and a description of his personal appearance had appeared on the list of deserters transmitted to the commandant of the place.

The gamekeeper consequently reasoned that an arrest in the street could not be attended with as much danger as would result from a visit to the cottage, on the part of the gendarmes; besides, he counted considerably upon the disorder that was everywhere rampant, and said to himself that they would not detain him in person indefinitely.

The evidence of the witnesses corresponded in every particular.

Taupier, who gave his testimony first, furnished the

key-note for the others, and all united in declaring that the good people, indignant at the deserter's conduct, merely wished to arrest him.

If he had been maltreated, it was only because he had tried to defend himself, and the pretended attempt at hanging was an innocent farce, merely intended to frighten him.

The case having been heard, the officer in charge reflected a moment, and then rendered his decision with an urbanity of language that softened the severity of the sentence.

"I greatly regret that you have not seen fit to answer my questions," he said to Landreau; "but that being the case, I am under the painful necessity of sending you to prison. You will be detained there until your identity has been established, but I hope that you will be at liberty in a few days. I can not thank you enough," he added, turning to the witnesses with a fraternal smile, "for the zeal that you have displayed in this case. The people are powerful, but they are also just, and I am satisfied that your intentions were excellent.

"You, my friend, are now at liberty to retire."

This last remark was addressed to the sergeant, and though the young Breton did not share the general opinion in regard to the prisoner's guilt, he had no desire to be mixed up in any difficulty with the local authorities, so he promptly availed himself of the permission.

The hunchback at first resolved to remain, but his confederate gave him such a meaning look over the tops of his spectacles, that he abandoned the idea, and left the room with the others, taking care, however, to be the last in the procession.

His desire to address a few words to Frapillon was so evident to that gentleman that he determined, if possible, to appoint an interview.

While the soldiers were forming into line to return to

their barracks, Frapillon, who had stepped outside ostensibly to see them off, began to stamp about in the snow like a man who is trying to warm his feet.

"This is bad weather for tramping about the streets, gentlemen," he remarked, pulling the hood of his overcoat up over his head. "I should like to get my blood to circulating a little more freely before I start, for it is terribly cold in my office."

"You are going out, then, captain?" inquired Taupier, carelessly. "Yes: I was just going to breakfast when you came in; and as I sha'n't be off duty until evening I shall have to get a bite at the nearest restaurant."

"With your permission I'll accompany you there, citizen," said the hunchback.

"And so will we!" exclaimed the other witnesses, who perhaps cherished a hope of being treated to a glass or two at the wine-shop on the next corner.

"Certainly, gentlemen, with pleasure," replied Frapillon, suavely, though he was by no means pleased at this addition to the company.

But on reaching the Avenue Trudaine, and just as Taupier was beginning to despair of securing the desired opportunity, the cunning captain paused suddenly and said:

"Excuse me, gentlemen, but I entirely forgot to give an important order to my lieutenant, and I must return to my office. I trust, however, that I shall soon have the pleasure of meeting you all again."

With this complimentary remark, J. B. Frapillon turned upon his heel, and as he passed the hunchback, who had loitered a little behind the others, he whispered:

"This evening, at nine o'clock, at the Rat-Mort."

CHAPTER IX.

THE Café Rat-Mort is extremely popular with the artists and writers who reside in the essentially literary quarter surrounding the Place Pigalle.

Its name has even become a familiar word in the central parts of the city, and more than one *habitué* of the gay terraces of the Boulevard Montmartre has not disdained to take a seat at the modest tables that line the façade of this already famous establishment.

In winter, the motley crowd that throng the *café* congregate in two large halls on the lower floor, and each different set takes possession of its favorite corner. There is the artists' corner, likewise the journalistic bench, and also the ladies' alcove, for the fair sex is abundantly represented at the Rat-Mort.

During the siege, however, the *clientèle* underwent an entire change, and the establishment was so crowded with soldiers that a stranger, on entering it, would have supposed himself in a garrison town a hundred leagues from the Place Pigalle.

The majority of these warriors belonged to the National Guard, but the close proximity of the barracks on the outer boulevard insured the patronage of many of the provincial militia.

By a sort of mutual consent the military patrons of the establishment occupied the front room, where they held high carnival, while the old *habitués*, representing the civil element of society, gathered in the back room to talk over the events of the day, while from the tall desk, where she sat enthroned, the pretty sovereign of this little empire bestowed her smiles impartially upon both classes of her subjects, and upon both sexes.

On the evening following the snowy day that had so nearly proved poor Landreau's last, the Rat-Mort was even more densely crowded than usual.

Mirth and hilarity reigned supreme in the entrance hall, where the little Breton sergeant was treating half a dozen fellows from Roscof and Morlaix.

At the further end of the next room, in which three of the militia were consoling themselves for their last dreary vigil on the ramparts by an interminable game of billiards, Taupier and Frapillon were sitting *vis-à-vis*, while upon the small marble table between them rose an imposing pile of checks which, in accordance with the custom that prevails in these places of entertainment, indicated the number of schooners drank. The assistant-editor and the business manager of the "Serpenteau" both professed a great fondness for beer, chiefly because they considered it an eminently democratic beverage; besides, in order that they might be able to talk together here, without attracting attention, they had deemed it advisable to assume the character of hard drinkers.

Neither of the two men were frequenters of the Rat-Mort, Taupier infinitely preferring that famous temple of Radicalism, the Café de Madrid; and J. B. Frapillon, broker and banker, feeling that his professional dignity forbade any patronage of second-class restaurants.

The neighboring tables were occupied—the one on the left by two long-haired men who were engaged in a game of *écarté*—a six-sous package of tobacco constituting the stakes; the one on the right by three women, whose tongues rattled on incessantly while they regaled themselves with some brandied cherries; so the two friends could discuss their plans for the future with little danger of interruption.

"So our man is safely disposed of," remarked Taupier, with a satisfied air.

"Yes, and for a good long time. I have friends in the

jail, and I recommended him to them in a pretty effectual manner."

"Still, I would much rather know he was hanging by the neck in the college building. It was such an easy and effectual way to get rid of him."

"Oh! you are always advocating violent measures. It is a mistake, my friend, a very great mistake. One can get rid of people without killing them, and if you adopt my theory you run no risk of the Court of Assizes."

"There has been none since the siege," said the hunchback, "and we shall suppress that relic of barbarism altogether as soon as the 'Moon with the Teeth' comes into power."

"Still, in the meantime, I think we had better not run any unnecessary risk. Gentle measures are the most potent after all."

"That talk is all very fine, but here two months have passed since we began working against these people, and our task is nowhere near completed yet."

"Taupier, my son, you are unfair. Let us recapitulate a little. When you came to see me near the end of September Valnoir & Co. had everything to fear. Their secret was known to five or six persons. To-day Master Pilevert is a member of our band, and he will unite with us, if necessary, against the common enemy."

"Yes," growled Taupier, "and some fine day when he has drunk a little more than usual, he will let the cat out of the bag."

"Drank more than usual! That would be an impossibility, for he does nothing else night and day," replied Frapillon, smiling.

"New, speaking of his pupil, as he calls the deaf and dumb gypsy—she was dangerous, and I confess that I saw no way of getting rid of her for awhile. But who gave Mouchabeuf instructions to dispatch her to the wilds of Germany, whence she will never return, instead of rashly

throwing her in the canal where her body would surely have been found, sooner or later."

"I advise you not to boast of that. The fool sent her to Saint Germain to join Saint Senier, who will drop down upon us some day when we least expect it."

"He died in the hospital, my dear fellow. Mouchabeuf heard so at Rueil, through his friend, the Prussian; and as for the fortune-teller, she has had plenty of time to return if she was going to, or if she hadn't been on the road to Berlin for six weeks."

"There is nothing to prove that such is the case, and I am by no means easy in mind. The gamekeeper troubled us," continued Frapillon, without troubling himself about the hunchback's misgivings; "and now he is safe in prison for a long time."

"The credit of that belongs to me," said Taupier, quickly. "If I had not bribed Bourignard and his imp of a son we should never have caught the old fox."

"The two women remain," interrupted the broker.

"Yes, and until we have them in our power we are no better off than we were at first."

"You are right, but we shall soon have them in our power."

"What will you do with them when you get them. You can not send them to Prussia, nor have them taken to prison by your men."

"No," replied Frapillon, coolly; "but—"

"But what?"

"I have a plan—"

"A plan!" repeated Taupier, shrugging his shoulders. "Upon my word! you amuse me immensely with all your fine talk about gentle measures and your plans. We all know what a plan is worth," added the hunchback, who had so often criticised the management of the city's defense.

"Mine is infallible, as you will admit in less than a week," replied J. B. Frapillon, imperturbably.

"Bah! you won't succeed in doing with two women who live secluded from the world what you did with a gypsy and a deserter."

"No, I shall do something entirely different, but the result will be the same."

"We'll see!" growled Taupier.

"Waiter, bring us two schooners!" he cried, after a moment, for he seemed to be afflicted with unquenchable thirst.

The quantity of beer that he had drunk and his arrogant manners were beginning to attract the attention of his neighbors.

The men on his left gazed in open-mouthed astonishment at a man who was wealthy enough to repeat his order every quarter of an hour, and the ladies on his right began to cast furtive glances at him.

One of them, a majestic beauty of about forty years, who was consoling herself for the loss of her former admirers by interesting herself in politics, fancied she detected a political pamphleteer in the distorted person of Taupier; and this idea having once entered her romantic brain she resolved to attract his attention at all hazards, and so began to talk for his special benefit.

"Yes, I tell you, my dears, that very strange things are going on in the neighborhood. The air is full of conspiracy, and I feel it my duty as a citizen to denounce the traitors," she remarked, impressively.

"I am not a citizen. I am from Picardy," retorted one of her companions, who answered to the mythological name of Aglaé, though she certainly had nothing in common with the most beautiful of the three graces.

"And I have no desire to act the part of a spy," declared the antiquated beauty who completed the trio.

"You don't know what you are talking about, Phemia," said the first speaker. "If you had allowed me to finish my story you would have found out that I am no spy. I have eyes, that is all."

"What have you seen, Madame Irma?" asked Aglaé.

"Well, you know I live on the Rue de Laval, and as my windows overlook the street, I can see what is going on opposite."

"There is nothing but a wall opposite the house where you live," sneered the skeptical Phemia.

"Yes, but behind the wall there is a garden that extends to the Rue de Navarin, and in the middle of this garden is a cottage that is occupied by two women—one old, the other young—who came from nobody knows where, who never go out, who receive no company, and who have a gray-headed man to wait upon them, and go out and get their provisions for them. Now what do you think of that?"

"I don't see anything very wonderful about that. It is no crime to have a servant, and to like to stay in one's own home."

"Especially such weather as this," remarked Aglaé. "If I had wood enough to keep me warm you wouldn't often see me in the street."

"That may be, but you at least are known in the neighborhood," replied Irma, majestically.

"Known but too well," remarked Phemia, *sotto voce*.

"While no one knows the name of these princesses in disguise, nor what they are doing, nor when they took possession of their present quarters. The house belongs to an aristocrat, a nobleman who resides in the country, and who never sets foot in it, for he has his taxes paid by his banker. Every evening, my dears, at the same hour—about eight o'clock—sometimes a little later—I see—"

"What?" exclaimed the other ladies, breathlessly.

"A light in the second story. It is always extinguished before midnight, and this light is green."

"Green!" repeated Aglaé, with a bewildered air.

"Why, it must be a signal," said Phemia, apparently better versed in the history of sieges.

"Ah, ha!" said Irma, triumphantly. "Don't you think now that it is my duty to denounce these spies to the commissioner of police?"

"I'm inclined to think so, indeed," declared Phemia, severely.

It is needless to say that Frapillon and Taupier had been listening to this conversation with the closest attention, and in order that they might be able to do this, without being guilty of any glaring breach of good manners, Frapillon had taken a newspaper from his pocket and apparently devoted himself to its perusal, while Taupier lighted a pipe.

Her companion's story seemed to have furnished the artless Aglaé with food for reflection, for she remained silent and thoughtful for several minutes; then:

"Doesn't the young lady dress in mourning?" she asked.

"Yes, the young lady, and the old lady, too."

"She's very pretty, too, isn't she?"

"She's a washed-out blonde, with a complexion like *papier-mâché*, and a wasp-like waist," replied Irma, who was a buxom brunette with a high color.

"She's the very lady I have in mind then."

"You can't possibly know her, for she never goes out, I tell you."

"She went out this evening, and I'm sure it was she, for I was passing your house when I saw her closing the little gate in the wall opposite you."

"Impossible. Where was she going?"

"I'll tell you," said Aglaé, who was not sorry to have a chance to hold forth in her turn.

"She was so pretty that I turned to get another look at her, and as I did, she stepped up to me and said, in the sweetest voice: 'Madame, will you be kind enough to show me a shop where I can purchase some bread?' As it happened, I was just starting out to get my dinner, so I told her to come with me, and we walked up the Rue de Laval together. I did my best to make her talk as we went

along, but she answered me only in monosyllables, and looked as if she might burst out crying at any moment. We reached the baker's on the corner of the Rue Condorcet just as he was going to close his shop, but we stepped inside, and she asked for some bread, but in such a funny way that it was very evident she had never been in the habit of going to market. 'Your card, madame, if you please,' said the baker. But she didn't even seem to know what that was. 'Do you belong in this neighborhood?' asked the man. Whereupon my lady stammered out three or four words, and turned even paler than before. I was about to interfere, when all of a sudden she ran out of the store and rushed up the Rue des Martyrs as fast as she could go."

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Mme. Irma, rejoiced to have her suspicions confirmed.

"It is plain enough that they are suspicious characters—women who are so afraid of being known that they won't apply for a provision order."

"And who have their food bought for them by a servant-man. I'll bet that it's Prussian rations they're eating," chimed in Phemia.

"I don't believe a word of it," retorted Aglaé. "I don't know anything about the old lady, but the young one is just as sweet as she can be, and I'm sure she couldn't be induced to injure any one."

Since the conversation of their neighbors had taken this interesting turn, the two gentlemen had not lost a word of it. Taupier had been puffing away at his pipe with so much ardor that he was now enveloped in a cloud after the manner of the gods of Olympus; while Frapillon, turning half-way around in his arm-chair, had made a screen of his newspaper in such a way as to hide his face from the speakers.

Thanks to this stratagem, the allies could make signs to each other, and even exchange a few words with impunity.

"Hunger drives wolves out of the woods," muttered Taupier. "No servant, no provisions."

"What do you think of my plan now?" inquired Frapillon, adjusting his spectacles.

The hunchback was about to reply when a terrible uproar burst forth in the adjoining room, the sound of boisterous, but husky voices, accompanied with the sharp crash of broken glass.

"I want another glass of brandy, I tell you. Hang the expense! I'll pay for it, I tell you. Do you think I've no money?"

"Put him out," yelled the crowd composed principally of militia men and led by the little sergeant. "It was evident that some one who had inbibed a little too much had overturned a table, and that a quarrel was imminent.

"Put me out! Just come and try it, if you dare, you white-livered cowards! You'll find it a harder job than you think to master the rampart of Avallon!"

"It is that brute Pilevert. We must get out of here without loss of time, if we don't want him to compromise us," whispered Taupier.

"No," replied Frapillon in the same low tone. "On the contrary, we must remain to prevent any further foolishness on his part;" and he hastened into the adjoining room, closely followed by the hunchback.

A crowd of curious spectators had gathered around the overturned table, and in the middle of it the acrobat, red as a peony, and fairly foaming with rage, was standing in an attitude which he was evidently endeavoring to render classical, but intoxication was apparent in his every movement, and greatly impaired the grace of his posture.

It was only too evident that his footing was not firm; that the statue was tottering upon its base.

The spectators quickly perceived this fact, and indulged in some jesting remarks that infuriated the already angry man to the highest pitch.

"Come on, come on, I say, you make-believe soldier, and let me demolish you," he yelled, squaring himself like a boxing master.

The little Breton sergeant who had constituted himself the champion of the insulted parties, did not appear in the least terrified by his opponent's threats, but walking straight up to him:

"Will you let us alone or not; yes or no?" he asked, in the calmest possible voice.

A sullen growl was the only response of the acrobat, who hastily sprung forward to seize his despised enemy, but his brawny fist encountered nothing but vacancy.

The Breton had suddenly stooped, and his head converted into a battering-ram, struck the unfortunate Pilevert in the pit of the stomach, causing him to totter for a second, and then fall flat upon his back in the midst of the jeering spectators.

Lively applause greeted this act of prowess, and the tide of public sentiment began to turn in favor of the Breton.

"Bravo, *moblôt*!" cried several members of the National Guard.

"Now let's put the scoundrel out!"

"Send him to the station-house!"

These and similar cries were heard on every side, and it seemed more than likely that the unfortunate acrobat would be seized by the head and heels and thrown into the gutter without any ceremony.

But he found protectors when he least expected it. While he was vainly endeavoring to regain his footing, J. B. Frapillon, whose wits never deserted him, and who had already devised a way of extricating him from this unpleasant position, stooped and assisted the prostrate Hercules to his feet. When he had succeeded in extricating Pilevert from the heap of chairs and benches into which he had fallen, he prevented any exclamation of surprise by whispering in his ear these significant words:

"Not a word about us, if you want your pay."

Then he added aloud:

"The poor man is ill, and needs medical attention."

"You mean he's drunk," exclaimed a by-stander who had paused in his game of cards to watch the row.

"That is no unpardonable sin. A citizen may surely be forgiven for taking a glass too much in times like these," interposed Taupier.

"That's a fact!"

"And we did very wrong to allow him to be bullied by this Breton."

"We ought to avenge the insult inflicted upon him."

These exclamations resounded simultaneously from the group of billiard-players.

Another fight would not suit the plans of J. B. Frapillon, who hastened to dispel the rising storm.

"Gentlemen," he interposed with his usual urbanity, "I think you would make a great mistake, for the provincials are in force to-night; besides, such a disturbance would be extremely distasteful to the pretty mistress of the establishment, so with your permission I will escort this worthy man to his home. Come, my brave fellow," he added, in a paternal tone, turning to Pilevert, "make an effort and come with me. My friend and I will see you safely home."

The only response was a sullen growl that might pass for a consent, and Frapillon paid the bill, and even the charge for the glassware and crockery demolished.

This done, he offered an arm to Pilevert, and half led, half dragged him to the door; but scarcely had the three reached the middle of the Rue Frochot, when Frapillon dropped the acrobat's arm, and said to him sternly:

"I have told you before, Pilevert, that I would allow you to drink at home, but that I positively forbade you to appear in a state of intoxication in public places, where you might gravely compromise the society to which you have the honor to belong. I will overlook the offense this

once, but I warn you that the very next time you are guilty of such an offense, you will have to settle with me."

"Yes, yes, I understand," murmured Pilevert, who regarded the suave broker with wholesome awe.

"Let me see, where do you live?" asked Frapillon, brusquely.

"Quite near here, at Montmartre," said Pilevert, whose articulation was becoming more and more indistinct.

"Then help me drag him home, Taupier. If we leave him here, he will be arrested, and perhaps get us into trouble."

As they were leaving the Rue Frochot, a woman passed them very hurriedly, and in the bright light that streamed from the windows of the restaurant her face and form attracted the attention of Frapillon, who paused abruptly.

"Did you recognize her?" he asked, turning hastily to Taupier.

The latter was too much engaged in supporting the tottering steps of Pilevert to pay much attention to passers-by, for, now that Frapillon had let go his hold on the acrobat's arm, the whole weight of the intoxicated man fell upon the frail body of the hunchback, and threatened to send him reeling into the gutter at any moment.

"Recognized whom?" growled Taupier, who was evidently in the worst of humor. "You had better help me, instead of stopping to stare at people that pass."

"Hush, you simpleton!" replied the broker. "Luck is serving us much better than you deserve. The person who just passed us is the young lady that lives in the cottage."

"Impossible!"

"I am positive of it. Let us wait a moment and see what she is going to do."

The young lady, after passing the lighted corner on which the Rat-Mort stood, turned hurriedly into the now deserted Place Pigalle.

The snow was still falling, and the fountain that adorned

the center of the broad esplanade was a mass of icicles, so with the leafless trees and the closed shops, the scene was certainly cheerless in the extreme.

It could have been stern necessity alone that impelled a young girl to venture out alone in such weather, and in this lonely neighborhood, and Frapillon was not mistaken—Frapillon, who at that moment must have experienced much the sensations of a spider who sees a poor fly hovering about the web in which he will eventually become entangled.

Not that the broker took the troubles of his friends Valnoir and Taupier so much to heart, but through discovering secrets for others he had finally become personally interested in the matter, and was now working hard to further the execution of a little plan of his own.

His great desire now, consequently, was to get rid of his present companions.

“Where can she be going?” J. B. Frapillon said to himself, “and how am I to follow her without dragging these two idiots along at my heels?”

The first question seemed a difficult one to answer, for the girl, after crossing the square, continued her walk past the houses on the eastern side of the *rond-point*, pausing at every door and looking up, then resuming her walk as if she had not found what she was looking for.

After hesitating and retracing her steps several times, she finally approached the door-way of a large house occupied by a colony of artists on the corner of the square.

Frapillon himself thought at first that she was going to ring, but he saw her lean forward to read the names on the brass plate above the bell, and then straighten herself up with a despairing gesture and walk rapidly away.

A thought suddenly occurred to him.

“I think I understand,” he muttered, trembling with joy, “and now I shall be stupid, indeed, if I can not accomplish my aim.”

Seizing the hunchback by the arm, he said curtly:

"Take this man home, as you know where he lives. I am going to follow the princess."

This arrangement did not suit Taupier for many reasons. In the first place, he had not implicit confidence in his accomplice, and he preferred to watch him on all momentous occasions; moreover, he found the guidance of Pilevert too hard a job for him, especially as that worthy clung to him with the energy of a drowning man. But Frapillon did not stop to listen either to his friend's protests or threats, but hastened on, leaving him to get out of the scrape as best he could.

Taupier, however, being enraged at this base desertion, made one desperate attempt to free himself by tripping his companion up. This maneuver proved successful, at least in part, for the colossus fell like a ponderous oak-tree uprooted by the tempest, but unfortunately the hunchback had not calculated all the effects of this skillfully managed fall.

Pilevert had not relaxed his hold in falling, so he dragged his companion down with him, landing directly on top of him.

"Help! help!" cried Taupier, who was nearly crushed by the ponderous form that weighed him down; but Pilevert, in falling in the snow, lost the little consciousness left him, and all Taupier's efforts to move him proved unavailing.

Frapillon, delighted at the ridiculous accident that had just freed him from Taupier, would certainly have indulged in a hearty laugh if he had not been so afraid of losing sight of the young lady who was now hastily recrossing the square.

In another moment he found himself face to face with her, and while he was endeavoring to decide upon the best way of opening a conversation with her, she suddenly put an end to his embarrassment with these words:

"A physician, sir. Will you please direct me to the house of a physician?"

"I guessed correctly," thought Frapillon.

For the broker, seeing the young girl run from door to door, had guessed the errand upon which she was thus rushing about, in the middle of the night. His first impulse had been to conduct Renée to the house of a physician of his acquaintance, a person devoted to the cause which the "Serpenteau" had espoused, but on reflection he abandoned this idea, being of the opinion that it was always better to have no confidant if it could be avoided.

Besides, he had special reasons for desiring to act alone that evening, and when he found himself face to face with Renée de Saint Senier he felt that the battle was already won.

"Has any accident befallen you, madame, that you are so anxious to secure a physician's services?" he asked, in his blindest tones.

"Not me, sir, but a person who—who is a very dear relation of mine, and I implore you to tell me—"

"I can do better than that, madame. I can accompany you to the home of the patient."

"What! you are—"

"A physician, yes, madame; and entirely at your service."

Renée lifted her eyes gratefully to Heaven as if to thank God for the assistance He had rendered her.

"Oh, thank you, thank you, sir!" she said, gratefully.

"I am only doing my duty," said Frapillon, modestly, "and I am very glad that chance thus placed me in your path."

"Then come at once, I entreat you. The danger is great, I fear," replied the girl, turning to retrace her steps.

"Take my arm, madame," said the pretended doctor, resolved not to lose sight of his new acquaintance.

Renée responded with a gesture of refusal, but Frapillon would not acknowledge himself defeated.

"You can get on much more rapidly with my assistance, I assure you," he insisted, again offering his arm with all the grace of which he was capable.

This time the girl accepted the courtesy.

It was beginning to thaw now, and the descent of the inclined plane formed by this large square proved no easy matter.

"I have her now," exulted the broker, as he felt his companion's hand involuntarily tighten its hold upon his arm, as she occasionally slipped a little on the half-melted snow.

So leaning unwittingly upon the most dangerous of all her enemies, the poor child hastened on.

"Do you not think, madame, that it would be advisable to send for your family physician while I am doing what I can to relieve the patient?" her companion asked, gently.

"We have none. We are strangers in the city," replied the girl, not without embarrassment.

This was exactly what Frapillon wished to learn, for he did not want to run any risk of an encounter with a genuine doctor.

"Oh, in that case, I will assume charge of the patient with pleasure," he replied. "Before I felt some fear lest I might be interfering with a brother physician's practice."

Renée started as if the remark had suddenly excited some misgivings in her mind, and this was undoubtedly the case, for she said in a troubled voice:

"You need have no fears on that score, sir; but it is my duty to tell you that we have no money, and—"

"That is a good thing to know," thought Frapillon.

"And we shall not be able to pay you just now, but by and by, whatever price you may set upon your services, we shall be glad to compensate you."

"Allow me to reassure you upon this point, my dear young lady," replied her escort, with a smile. "I practice medicine principally for humanity's sake, as I am rich enough to exact no fees from my patients, and even to assist them, if necessary," he added.

"I thank you, sir, but we have need of your medical skill only," said the young lady, whose pride had evidently been aroused.

"I had no intention of wounding you, I assure you," answered Frapillon, soothingly, for he perceived that he had made a mistake. "Have we much further to go?" he added, with an air of tender interest. "Walking through this half-melted snow is very fatiguing, and I fear—"

"Only to the end of the next street on the left," replied the girl, whose agitation seemed to increase in proportion as she approached the cottage.

Just then chance brought them face to face with a party of women who were evidently on their way home from the Rat-Mort. Frapillon felt sure that they were the garrulous females who had occupied the next table to his at the *café*, but he was in too much of a hurry to reach his destination to pay much attention to the meeting.

Unfortunately Mme. Irma and her friend Aglaé had excellent eyesight, and they both recognized the young lady.

"Well, well, there is that ~~god~~ about again," remarked the former.

"And the gentleman with her is the one we saw in the *café* just now," said Aglaé.

"He's escorting her to the baker's, perhaps," laughed Phemia.

"Let's see," responded Irma.

And turning, the three women began to follow them.

Frapillon was not to be daunted, however. Feigning the most complete ignorance in regard to the place to which his companion was conducting him, he yielded himself up

entirely to her guidance, and when she at last paused in front of the little gate in the wall he manifested great astonishment.

"Will you be kind enough to follow me," said Renée, after pressing a spring that made the gate turn upon its hinges.

Frapillon entered, concealing his delight with very tolerable success, and the gate closed noiselessly behind him.

The pretended physician's heart throbbed violently as he passed through the door-way leading into this cottage whose inmates had been under his close surveillance for more than two months. In fact, he expressed very much the sensations of a general who, by some lucky chance has been suddenly admitted within the walls of a long-besieged city.

At first his new rôle of physician had embarrassed him a little, but nature had endowed him with so much audacity and assurance that he was capable of playing almost any part admirably, so quite entering into the spirit of the impersonation, he asked:

"When did this illness attack the patient?"

"Just now, sir. It came on very suddenly. I was alone in the house with her, and being much frightened, of course I rushed out at once in pursuit of medical aid."

The path shaded with lindens was quickly traversed, and guided by the young girl Frapillon entered the mysterious cottage. The open doors testified to the haste with which Renée had left the house, and by a light that was burning at the end of the hall, one could see the interior of the room in which Regina had been received on the evening of her abduction.

Mme. de Muire was lying in an arm-chair, pale and motionless, with her head thrown back and her eyes closed, and looking so much like a dead person that for a moment the pretended physician was deceived.

But the girl threw herself upon her knees beside her aunt, and seized her hands with an impetuosity that aroused

Mme. de Muire from her stupor, and made her utter a long sigh.

"Heaven be praised! she is regaining consciousness," murmured Renée.

J. B. Frapillon saw this only too plainly, and though only a moment before he had been secretly rejoicing at a denouement that would greatly facilitate his plans, he knew how to bear disappointment, and forthwith proceeded to feel the patient's pulse.

"There is great weakness accompanied by great mental prostration," he murmured, with a very excellent imitation of a physician's manner.

The sound of a strange voice aroused Mme. de Muire from her long fainting fit, and opening her eyes she gazed in astonishment at the strange face that was bending over her.

"You feel better now, do you not, my dear madame?" inquired Frapillon, in the gentle tones he knew so well how to assume.

"This gentleman is a physician, aunt," interposed Renée.

"Thank you, my dear child," Mme. de Muire managed to falter, though not without great difficulty. "I feel better now, and I shall soon be quite myself again I hope."

"Pray do not fatigue yourself, madame," said the pretended physician; "the slightest effort might prove very injurious to you, and your niece here will tell me all about your attack."

"I was sitting here beside my aunt," began Renée, "when I saw her suddenly turn pale, and fall back unconscious in her arm-chair. I sprung up and ran to her, only to find her hands icy cold and her eyes set. I spoke to her, but she did not answer me, and becoming frightened—"

"You had rushed out in search of a physician, when chance, or I should rather say Providence, placed me in your path," the pretended physician concluded for her.

"Yes, and I again thank you for your kindness in com-

ing so promptly, but I entreat you, if possible, to relieve my anxiety, and tell me—”

“What I think of madame’s condition?” interrupted J. B. Frapillon. “Ah, well, I find it very encouraging. The attack seems to have been only a fainting fit, and I have every reason to hope that with rest and careful attention we shall soon have the patient all right again. But before I prescribe any remedies I should like to know the circumstances under which this attack occurred.”

Renée glanced at the speaker with evident uneasiness.

“I—I really do not know what could have caused it,” she stammered at last.

“She had experienced no keen emotion or deep disappointment?”

“No,” replied the girl, though not without considerable hesitation.

“I ask this question, mademoiselle,” continued Frapillon, “because the mental condition usually has a great deal to do with crises of this kind; but, in this case, we must probably look elsewhere for the cause, so I must again beg you to pardon me if I ask—”

“What, sir?” asked Renée, seeing the pretended doctor pause.

“If I ask you what your dear invalid’s physical condition has been of late. If she has been subjected to—to privations of any kind, for instance?”

Mlle. de Saint Senier turned as red as a cherry, and her agitation increased very perceptibly when she perceived that Mme. de Muire had just been seized with a convulsive trembling.

“Good heavens! mademoiselle,” continued the pretended physician. “I entreat you to believe that I have not the slightest intention of wounding you, or even of meddling with matters that do not concern me, but this is a case in which it is absolutely necessary for me to be conversant with all the facts, and—”

"My aunt has eaten nothing since yesterday," said Renée, with the brusqueness one often displays in making a painful confession.

"That explains her weak condition; and I now understand the treatment we shall be obliged to pursue."

A long pause followed, for having thus been made master of the situation, Frapillon wished to weigh his advantages in order to make the best possible use of them.

Renée's eyes drooped, and Mme. de Muire had closed hers as if she wished to have no knowledge of what was going on around her.

The silence became embarrassing.

It was finally broken by Frapillon, however, he having concluded that the time to strike a decisive blow had come.

"Listen to me, my dear child," he said, without appearing to notice the slight frown of the proud descendant of the Saint Seniers upon hearing herself thus addressed. "I was speaking to you just now of the exalted calling of the physician; mine, I hope, is even higher and nobler, for I have sufficient experience and sympathy for the sorrows of others to sometimes be able to heal afflicted souls as well. Confide in me, and do not hesitate to tell me the truth. Do you suppose that I can not guess it?" he added, with a friendly earnestness that would have done honor to the most talented actor. "We are living, alas! in peculiarly trying times, and before doctoring my patients I begin by assisting them, and by shielding them as much as possible from the hardships of this frightful siege."

These words were uttered with so much apparent feeling that they dispelled the last remnant of distrust that lingered in Renée's heart.

"I thank you, sir," she said, gratefully, offering him her hand. "I have confidence in you, and I will tell you all."

In spite of his wonderful self-control J. B. Frapillon had

no little difficulty in concealing his delight on hearing Renée thus offer him her confidence.

"Speak, mademoiselle," he said, in his most dignified tones, "and rest assured that you are confiding your troubles to a friend—or at least to one who hopes to become a friend," he made haste to add, seeing that he had gone a little too far.

"I must first tell you, sir," began Renée, "the name of the persons to whom you have so kindly offered your advice and assistance. My aunt, who will perhaps owe her life to you, is the Comtesse de Muire, and the sister of my deceased father, the Baron de Saint Senier."

"You are an orphan, then?" interrupted Frapillon, with an air of the tenderest interest.

"I lost my father in early childhood, and my mother died in bringing me into the world," replied the girl, in tones that trembled perceptibly.

"Poor child!" sighed the business manager of the "Serpenteau."

"My aunt has taken the place of the parents I so unfortunately lost in my infancy," continued Renée. "She reared me as tenderly as if I had been her own daughter, and I have never been separated from her."

"Noble hearts!" murmured Frapillon, lifting his eyes heavenward.

"Our family consists, or rather did consist, of my brother—and of a cousin who bears our name—"

J. B. Frapillon had only to listen now, to learn what he had so long desired to know, but his detective instinct warned him that a confidence of this sort must be reciprocated; and that sooner or later he would be obliged to reveal his own name and place of residence.

He had a falsehood all ready, and he was too clever to wait until the question was put to him.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle," he said; "but I feel too proud of your confidence not to tell you at once whom you

honor with it. My name is Pierre Molincharde. I reside at No. 175, Boulevard Pigalle, where I have been practicing medicine for about ten years, and I have no other claim upon your esteem than that of having done a little good in the world."

This was said with an apparent frankness that would have deceived a veteran magistrate, and the pretended doctor ran no risk in thus enveloping himself in the personality of a physician whom Taupier styled his *âme damnée*. Mme. de Muire made an almost imperceptible gesture that meant:

"This is certainly a remarkably well-bred man."

Renée bowed slightly, and resumed her story.

"In summer we reside upon our family estate in Burgundy; our winters we have heretofore spent in a house belonging to my aunt, on the Rue d'Anjou. My brother being in the navy, he spent very little time in France. Would to Heaven that duty had not called him here this year!"

Mlle. Saint Senier's voice trembled so that she was obliged to pause, whereupon Frapillon cried hypocritically:

"Ah! I understand; he has fallen a victim to this cruel war?"

"You are mistaken, sir," continued the girl, bitterly; "I had not the consolation of knowing that my brother died for his country. He was killed in a duel—in a duel, or, rather, he was—"

She did not finish the sentence, and the terrible word Frapillon was expecting did not pass his lips.

"It happened several days before the beginning of the siege," continued the sister of the dead man; "and we had but just left Maisons Laffite where we had spent such a happy summer when this terrible misfortune befell us. On the same day my brother was killed the Prussians reached the suburbs of Paris, and we had barely time to take refuge here."

"Alone, and without friends?"

"We had one relative," continued Mlle. de Saint Senier, with some embarrassment—"a cousin, to whom I am betrothed."

J. B. Frapillon lowered his eyes discreetly, but listened with redoubled attention.

"My aunt had sold her house on the Rue d'Anjou, and our cruel bereavement making us both averse to taking up our abode in the fashionable part of the city, we decided to take possession of this cottage which has been in the possession of our family for a long time, and where my father died, under circumstances which have been repeated again and again in our family during the past half century."

J. B. Frapillon held his breath so as not to lose a syllable.

Renée had turned very pale, and she now paused as if she lacked strength to continue.

"But all this can not interest you, sir," she said, at last, "and I will not trespass too much upon your patience."

The stranger tried to protest.

"My cousin held a lieutenancy in the Garde Mobile of our native province," continued Renée, in a tone that effectually prevented any questions. "He was stationed with his company just outside the city limits, and his visits were our only consolation. One night an attack was made upon the outpost that he commanded, and Roger, dangerously wounded, fell into the hands of the enemy."

"But he is living? You will see him again, will you not?"

"He is dead," replied the girl, forcing back her tears. "He died in the hospital at Saint Germain, cared for by unfriendly hands, and without a friend to close his eyes."

"How do you know this?"

"The news came through the Prussians themselves. Our family is not unknown in Germany, and those who killed him did us this favor."

"Why, this is terrible!" exclaimed Frapillon, who would have been willing to pay liberally for this valuable information.

"But this is not all," continued Renée, bitterly, "for God has not yet taken pity on us. Two devoted hearts were left us; that of a young girl who had been with my brother at the last, and that of an old family servant."

"Well?"

"One night the girl was taken by force from this very house, into which some miscreants had forced an entrance, and I feel certain that she must have met with a violent death at the hands of scoundrels to us unknown. This morning the faithful servant who was still watching over us went out, and he has not yet returned."

"Why, this is a thrilling romance that you are relating, my dear young lady!" exclaimed the stranger.

"It is the lamentable truth," said Mlle. de Saint Senier, in tones of unutterable sadness.

A profound silence followed.

Mme. de Muire's hands were clasped upon her lap, and big tears were rolling down her thin cheeks. Frapillon's heart throbbed with joy—the joy of a tiger who sees his prey already within his reach.

"Poor ladies!" he said, softly.

"Poor—yes," repeated Renée, with feverish energy. "I promised to tell you all, and I intend to keep my word. We were about to leave for Saint Senier when the siege made us prisoners here; my aunt had not time to receive expected remittances from her steward; two lone women can not keep a large amount of ready money in their possession with safety—three months have exhausted our resources, and now—"

"Ah, mademoiselle, I bless the Heavenly Father who placed me in your path," interrupted the pretended physician, devoutly. "A man, you see, mademoiselle, can do what a young lady and an invalid would not dare to at-

tempt. "Can it be possible that there is in Paris at the present time no friend or relative to whom—"

"Our poor Landreau wore himself out in his efforts to find some person of our acquaintance, but failed."

"But had you or your relatives no banker here in former years?"

"My cousin had no fortune. My brother had been here only three days."

"And you have no bonds or securities of any kind in your possession?" asked Frapillon, wishing to be sure that his victims were completely in his power.

"Landreau took our last bank-note out to be changed this morning. I had just given it to him when he so mysteriously disappeared."

"That is a good thing to know," thought Frapillon.

Then, raising his head, the wretch said in tones of the deepest sympathy and solicitude:

"You certainly will not refuse me the pleasure of assisting you, my dear child."

"Assisting us," repeated Renée, shaking her head with a doubting air.

"Have you no confidence in me?" asked Frapillon, anxious to take immediate advantage of his opportunity.

"Why should I not have, after all the interest you have manifested in us?" responded the girl, rather evasively.

"Then be good enough to listen to me, and, first of all, let it be understood that the want of money is to give you no further anxiety. As I had the honor of telling you a few moments ago, I am rich, and—"

"Pardon me, sir," said Renée, whose pride was instantly aroused by this rather too direct remark; "I thank you for your kind intentions, but I must beg you not to insist. However great our need may be, we can not accept charity."

"And who said anything about charity, mademoiselle?" exclaimed the stranger, with a sort of grave brusqueness.

"When one bears a name like yours, and possesses a fortune like yours, one can get money whenever one wants it."

"We have just had conclusive proof to the contrary, and until communication is opened with the provinces—"

"Oh, that is all nonsense! Your servant could have known nothing about business, for the difficulties he had to contend with were of the most trivial nature. You may be acquainted with no one in Paris; but your chateau and your estates in Burgundy are known here."

"How can that be?" inquired the girl, with an air of astonishment.

"It is quite evident that you know very little about business," remarked Frapillon with a smile. "I assure you, however, my dear child, that there are plenty of bankers who would be glad to loan you all the money you will need to last you until the end of the siege, and even more, upon the mere disclosure of your identity."

"I had not thought of that," replied Mlle. de Saint Senior, after a moment's reflection; "besides, as all our friends are absent from the city, who could recommend us to any banker?"

"Why, I, of course, mademoiselle; Doctor Molinchart, who is sufficiently well-known, thank Heaven! for my word to be considered sufficient."

Renée turned to Mme. de Muire, as if to ask her advice.

"And I am quite sure that madame your aunt will see no objection in such an arrangement," added the doctor.

The sick lady, who had regained her strength in some measure, had been listening to this conversation with evident interest, though up to this time she had taken no part in it. Upon being addressed thus directly, the old lady started violently as if the necessity of replying was most distasteful to her, and in fact the feelings that were agitating her placed her in a very embarrassing position.

Reared in a family in which wealth had descended from generation to generation for centuries, and in which the cus-

toms of the old *régime* had been ever maintained, the countess had been accustomed to leave all business matters and the entire management of her fortune to her steward. She signed leases when it was unavoidable, but everything else was left to her agent, who collected the rents, invested her surplus funds for her, and exercised a general supervision over the entire property. The natural result of this mode of life, so common in former years, but so little practiced by the wealthy in these days, was an absolute ignorance in regard to all business matters; and being about a hundred years behind the times, it is not at all surprising that she was greatly embarrassed and perplexed by these offers of pecuniary assistance from an entire stranger, especially as J. B. Frapillon, in spite of, or perhaps rather because of, his easy and rather familiar manner, inspired her with only a moderate amount of confidence, and no liking whatever.

On the other hand, the prospect of financial embarrassment that amounted to positive penury frightened her even more on Renée's account than on her own, and the physician's furnished an unhopèd-for means of escape. Still, she had lived too long not to know the danger of placing one's self under obligations to comparative strangers.

"Sir," she said, after a long silence that J. B. Frapillon imputed chiefly to weakness, "I am truly grateful to you for your kindness, and I should not hesitate to take advantage of it if I could feel sure that a mere recommendation from you would suffice with a banker."

"A recommendation supported by my indorsement, of course," replied the pretended physician, who was extremely anxious to establish a claim to the gratitude of his new acquaintances.

"That is exactly what I supposed," answered the old lady, gently; "and consequently I can not accept such a favor from a—a person I have met this evening for the first time."

Frapillon bit his lip. He was not prepared for a delicacy of feeling that he had never encountered among his

clients on the Rue Cadet, and this refusal upset all his carefully made plans.

"But it is no favor, as you will pay interest on the loan," he exclaimed, with an astonishment that was not feigned this time. "I have a friend who is in the banking business, and I should only have to say a word to him for you to get your money in a couple of hours."

It is needless to say that the friend referred to was none other than J. B. Frapillon himself, who intended to take from his own strong box the funds to chain his victims, his desire to win their gratitude having become much more great since he had found himself in the presence of the charming heiress of Saint Senier.

All sorts of romantic and absurd fancies were flitting through his brain, among them stories of the first revolution in which *sans-culottes* had saved noble damsels to marry them afterward.

"So I will leave you now," he said, making a movement as if about to go, "but on my return I will bring you ten thousand francs for your immediate wants, and afterward we will draw up a note which you can sign if you are so disposed."

"That would be equivalent to accepting this money from you, sir, and you must understand that such a thing would be impossible," said Renée, with a cold dignity calculated to put an end to further insistence.

"But my dear young lady, what is to become of you?" inquired Frapillon with the compassionate air of a man who sees that misfortune is inevitable, "and what is to become of Madame la Comtesse, accustomed as you both are to comfort and luxury?"

"I can work," replied the young girl, quietly.

"You work! Ah, my poor child, do you not know that it is well-nigh impossible for a woman to earn an honest living here in the best of times, and that it is a hundred times more difficult since the siege."

"There are free distributions of food. I am not ashamed of my poverty. I will apply for relief—"

And obtain nothing, for you have no friends nor relatives in this neighborhood, nor, indeed, any legal domicile. I'll wager that you haven't even a permit to purchase food."

"That is true," said Renée, hanging her head.

Mme. de Muire had become very pale, indeed she looked very much as if she was about to faint.

"Listen, mademoiselle," said the pretended physician, with kindly gravity; "I understand your refusal, and honor you for it, but you will not persist in it, I am sure, when it amounts to positive cruelty, and it would be cruelty to expose your aunt to further privations in her present condition. I tell you very frankly that in that case it would be my duty, as a physician, to have her taken to a hospital immediately."

The young girl could not repress a nervous start.

"Don't be alarmed, however," continued Frapillon; "I have another plan to submit to you, and I have sufficient confidence in your kindness of heart and sound common sense to feel sure that you will not refuse to listen to me. In addition to my practice I have charge of a small private hospital, where patients are comfortably lodged and cared for. Oh, do not take offense, all this is not done gratuitously, I assure you. Patients pay for these attentions, and pay very liberally, for my patrons are all people of the better class. You decline to accept my money, my indorsement, or my recommendation. So be it. But I do not see that there is anything to prevent you from entering an establishment where your bill will be presented to you on the day of your departure. You most assuredly can accept from me the same credit that would be granted you at a hotel in Dieppe or Vichy."

This time Mlle. de Saint Senier's face revealed an emotion which Mme. de Muire seemed to share.

Frapillon awaited their reply with no little anxiety.

What he had just said was partially true, after all, inasmuch as such a private hospital really existed, under the charge of the Dr. Molinchard, whose name he had already appropriated.

"What is that noise?" asked Renée, suddenly.

Frapillon listened with secret dismay.

Repeated blows were resounding upon the little gate on the Rue de Laval, and in the silence of the night the noise assumed a really ominous character. One was almost tempted to believe that a mob was besieging the house.

"Are you expecting any one?" inquired Frapillon, greatly annoyed at this unexpected interruption.

"No one," replied Mlle. de Saint Senior, who seemed much frightened.

"Then these persons must have made a mistake in the house."

"I am afraid not," replied Mme. de Muire, "especially as we seem to have been regarded with suspicion in the neighborhood for some time past. Almost every day our poor Landrean has been obliged to answer all sorts of questions in regard to us, and I fear that his disappearance may have led to an invasion of this sort."

"The uproar is increasing," remarked the physician.

It was evident now that several persons were battering at the door with implements of divers kinds, and it seemed more than probable that it would eventually yield to the combined efforts of the crowd.

Frapillon did not know what action to take.

An incident which he would have done his best to promote the evening before deranged all his plans now he had succeeded in effecting a peaceable entrance into the place; but he finally decided that it would be better for him to go and meet the intruders than to await the intrusion of an enraged throng.

"Will you allow me to go and see what the matter is, ladies?" he inquired, rising.

And without giving them time to reply he left the room

and hastened down the walk to the gate in the wall which he unhesitatingly threw open.

He had scarcely done so before at least a dozen persons pushed by him into the yard.

"What do you want, citizens?" asked J. B. Frapillon, coolly.

Though he addressed them as citizens there were several women in the party, and in the foremost rank appeared the three charming creatures who had occupied the next table at the Rat-Mort.

In fact, Mme. Irma seemed to have assumed command of the party, for she stalked into the yard with the imposing air of a drum-major, and it was she who took it upon herself to reply.

"We want to go through this house," she said, in a tone of authority.

"And by what authority do you thus force an entrance into a private dwelling?" demanded Frapillon, who did not hesitate to appeal to the law when it suited his interests.

"In the name of the people," responded Mme. Irma, majestically.

"Yes, yes!" cried the others.

"Still, you can hardly refuse to tell what you expect to find here?"

"We want to see those two female aristocrats who are in league with the Prussians."

While this conversation was going on Frapillon was engaged in studying the crowd, which proved to be much less formidable than he had feared, for in spite of the threats he had heard in the *café* there seemed to be no official at the head of the party, probably because Mme. Irma had not had time to pay a visit to a commissioner of police.

Nor was the crowd very large; the three women, half a dozen *gamins*, and seven or eight working-men with two or three citizens of the middle class made up the entire party.

It was among these last that Frapillon hoped to find

some benevolent auxiliary, and he was scrutinizing the faces of those nearest him, when he suddenly felt a light pressure on his arm, and turning, he saw that the person who had touched him so cautiously was the very physician whose identity he had assumed for the time being.

This Molinchard, a very obscure member of the Paris medical faculty, was a tall, slim man, about forty years of age, with long straight hair that hung down upon his coat collar and a thin sallow face.

Though a graduate of medicine, and the possessor of a genuine diploma, Molinchard had taken a deep interest in politics from his youth, and as he had not the ability to hew out his way alone, he had allied himself closely with the clever and audacious Frapillon, and had become one of the numerous pawns that the strategist of the Rue Cadet manipulated so skillfully.

Molinchard obeyed each word or sign from his chief like an automaton, and the response was, in this instance, an imperious glance in which the submissive physician read a command to be silent.

Sure now of the assistance of this devoted slave, J. B. Frapillon began his defense of his protégées with a much lighter heart.

"You are mistaken, madame," he said, politely turning to the irascible Phemia. "The persons who reside here are true patriots, and they do not spend their time in making signals to the enemy for the best of reasons—both of them are ill."

"You can't make us believe that," cried the spiteful Irma. "I saw one of them in the street only a few moments ago."

"She conquered her own weakness in order to go out in search of me, and bring me to the bedside of her almost dying aunt. For I have the honor to be a physician," added Frapillon, with a dignity that was not without its effect, especially as members of the medical fraternity are privileged characters in civilized and uncivilized countries alike.

"It is quite possible that he is telling us the truth," muttered the compassionate Aglaé.

"This is all very fine, but you will have to prove it."

"Yes, certainly," chimed in Phemia.

"Come, let us go through the house," cried a laborer.

"Citizens, I have the greatest possible respect for the patriotic motives that animate you, but I should fail in my duty as a physician if I consented to an exciting visit that might prove fatal to at least one of my patients."

An approving murmur was heard, and Frapillon, encouraged by this exhibition of sympathy, continued:

"I would suggest, therefore, that three of your number accompany me into the house. This gentleman, for instance," pointing, as if by chance, to his faithful coadjutor, Molinchard, "madame here," turning to the tender-hearted Aglaé, "and any other person who chooses to go. Then, if you find that I have told you the truth, I hope you will do me the favor to retire quietly."

"Agreed! agreed!" cried the crowd.

The two persons designated promptly stepped to the pretended physician's side, and were immediately joined by one of the most zealous advocates of the visit.

"I ask only five minutes, citizens, and I must beg you to keep quiet until my return—for humanity's sake," added Frapillon, who knew that grandiloquent phrases never fail to make an impression on a crowd.

The little party then proceeded toward the cottage, Aglaé, who was evidently much flattered by the preference shown her, leading the way. Molinchard and Frapillon walked immediately behind her.

"Swear to whatever I say," the pretended physician whispered to the real one.

"All right; I understand," replied his willing tool, in the same tone.

On reaching the door of the cottage Frapillon stopped the little party, and remarked:

"I fear that our sudden entrance might startle these poor ladies, so if you will allow me I will step on ahead, and inform them of your intended visit, and then return to escort you in."

"Do so, citizen, do so, of course," responded the people's delegate, promptly. "This little lady here will keep me company."

Aglæ bowed with a gracious smile.

"But now I think of it," remarked the business manager of the "Serpenteau," catching the ball on the rebound, as the saying is, "perhaps it would be better to accustom these ladies gradually to the visitors they are to have, so this gentleman can accompany me," he added, turning to Molinchard."

And without waiting to hear any objections he led the way to the apartment he had left a few moments before, closely followed by the long-haired doctor.

The door at the end of the hall had been left ajar, and Frapillon was only obliged to push it open to enter. There had been no change in the mournful aspect of the room since his departure. Mme. de Muire was still sitting motionless in her arm-chair; Renée was holding one of her aunt's hands, and gazing up into her face, and the conversation which had passed between them during the absence of their pretended benefactor must have been very sorrowful in its nature, for there were traces of tears on their cheeks. The astonishment depicted upon the faces of the aunt and niece on perceiving Molinchard was not in the least hostile, however, for though capable of all sorts of knavery, the doctor looked like a fool, and wore such a benign air on first acquaintance that one was very likely to be deceived in regard to his true character.

On this occasion he bowed awkwardly, with the shrinking and modest air of a *débutante* that a more experienced friend has just introduced into society for the first time.

"We were needlessly alarmed, my dear ladies," re-

marked Frapillon, "though mademoiselle here was certainly not mistaken in supposing that an unruly crowd was besieging the door."

"Why! what harm have we ever done to any one?"

"None, most assuredly, but the dear people are incapable of reasoning calmly just now, and they distrust everything they do not understand."

"Explain, if you please," said Mme. de Muire, anxiously.

"Permit me first to introduce to you a gentleman who has been of great assistance to me in quieting these lunatics. This gentleman is a personal friend of mine, who happened to be passing, and thanks to our united efforts, we have been able to gain a slight respite."

"What! those people are still here?" exclaimed Mlle. de Saint Senier in alarm.

Frapillon's only reply was a grave nod.

"What do they want?" asked Renée, haughtily.

"They want to explore this house from top to bottom."

"That is impossible!" exclaimed Renée, springing up in great agitation. "One's private life must be respected, and though I am a woman, I assure you that I will find means to prevent such a flagrant violation of the laws as this."

"There must be some jealously guarded secret here," thought Frapillon. Then he said, aloud—

"Very little attention is paid to the laws in these days, unfortunately, and an entrance is often forced into private dwellings now on the same pretext they give."

"And of what crime are we accused, if you please?" demanded Renée, scornfully.

"Of—I really beg your pardon for repeating such an absurdity—of making signals to the enemy."

"Signals to the enemy!" repeated Mlle. de Saint Senier, completely bewildered, for she had never before had an opportunity to fathom the depths of Parisian folly and stupidity.

"Yes," replied Frapillon, shrugging his shoulders.

"They pretend that a light appears in the second story.

every night, about eight o'clock. This light, they say, is of a peculiar color—blue or green—I've forgotten which."

The young girl turned pale, and her aunt's pallid face betrayed deep emotion.

"But this is abominable!" exclaimed Ronée. "Are the people as stupid as they are ferocious?"

"Alas! mademoiselle, you are only too correct in your supposition, for I have seen the most shameful outrages committed of late, upon just such frivolous pretexts as this."

After making this by no means reassuring remark, Frapillon paused to note its effect.

If he wished to terrify the two women, he had succeeded beyond a doubt, for they seemed to be speechless with consternation, and thinking the moment had come to strike a decisive blow, he was about to speak, when Mlle. de Saint Senier checked him with a gesture.

"This cottage, where my father died, is a sacred place, and while I live no mob shall enter it," she said, in tones of firm resolve. "No, they shall not," she added, beginning to pace the floor with an agitated step.

"You did not allow me to finish, mademoiselle," said Frapillon, soothingly. "I was about to tell you that for this evening, at least, the danger can be averted if you will consent to make a slight concession which I will explain in a moment, but—"

"But what?"

"I can not vouch for the future. What occurred to-day, may occur again to-morrow; and so long as you continue to reside here your slightest act will be misconstrued, and will probably cause a catastrophe sooner or later."

"What are we to do, then?"

"Take my advice and leave this house, not to-morrow, but this very night, and take up your abode, in company with your aunt, in my private hospital, where no one will come to trouble you, I promise you."

Had Mlle. de Saint Senier suspected the twofold mean-

ing of these words she would have reflected long before she replied. But she was laboring under an excitement that deprived her of the power to reason calmly, and Mme. de Muire seemed to be struck by the advantages of the plan, for she nodded her head approvingly, as her niece said to the pretended doctor—

“Ah, well! so be it, doctor. I feel sure, sir, that you are incapable of betraying the confidence two unprotected and defenceless women repose in you, and we will accompany you upon one condition—”

“That is accepted in advance.”

“That I can come here as often as I like, and come alone.”

“Nothing could be easier. You can take the key away with you this evening, and revisit the cottage as often as you please. You may rest assured that I have no intention of making you a prisoner, my dear young lady,” he added, smiling.

“But how are we to get rid of this dangerous crowd?” asked Renée.

“Leave that to me,” replied Frapillon.

And turning to Molinchard, who up to this time had played the part of a mere looker-on, he said—

“Will you have the kindness, my friend, to bring in the two persons who are waiting in the hall?”

The physician obeyed with the submissiveness of an Eastern slave.

“The delegates I am obliged to introduce to you do not belong to the highest social rank,” remarked their benefactor, “but I must implore you to exercise a little charity, especially as I promise you that the interview shall not be a long one.”

He had scarcely uttered these words when Molinchard reappeared, escorting the sentimental Aglaé and her new admirer.

Frapillon, who understood the human heart pretty thoroughly, had not gone too far in promising that the interview would prove a short and eminently satisfactory one, for the emissaries of the people showed no lack of feeling

when they beheld the two lone women whose pale faces wore an expression of such deep grief.

The man paused upon the threshold, twirling his cap in his hand, and Aglaé wiped her eyes without making any attempt to enter.

“You see that I have not deceived you, my friends, and that these poor ladies are only grief-stricken, unoffensive fellow-creatures,” remarked Frapillon. “Now let us go and reassure your companions.”

As he placed himself at the head of the little party that seemed ready and anxious to beat a retreat, he found an opportunity to whisper to Molincharde:

“Go away with the crowd, but return for me in half an hour with a carriage.”

CHAPTER X.

DR. MOLINCHARD'S private hospital had nothing in common with the magnificent establishments of that kind which rear their imposing fronts along the road to Passy or Auteuil. A long building, awkwardly planted upon the side of Montmartre that overlooks the plain of Saint Denis, and a series of court-yards, surrounded by whitewashed walls, composed the structure and appurtenances under this very democratic physician's supervision.

The building was originally intended for a factory, but after the failure of the unfortunate manufacturer who formerly occupied it, Molincharde succeeded in leasing it at a very low rate. The oracle of the Rue Cadet having declared that a private hospital in that unpretentious part of the city and in the immediate vicinity of the fortifications was an absolute necessity, Molincharde, who had been vainly endeavoring to establish himself in a lucrative practice for several years, did not demur especially when the broker offered to advance the money for the establishment of the institution, and allow him one half of the profits, which would be sure to amount to a handsome figure.

He found this new position eminently to his taste, particularly as it gave him quite an enviable notoriety in the neighborhood, and the honors of a deputyship seemed likely to be conferred upon him at no very distant day.

Since the revolution his importance had greatly increased, and the siege augmented not only the number of his patrons, but his fame.

He had, of course, decorated the main door-way of his establishment with the red cross of the sanitary commission; and though he received very few wounded soldiers, his doors were ever open to members of the National Guard who were rendered unfit for duty by a severe cold or an attack of bronchitis.

Indeed, cases of this kind had become so numerous that the certificates of illness furnished by the doctor yielded him quite a handsome addition to his income.

Yet, in spite of this prosperity, the hospital was conducted upon the same economical scale. There was a large dormitory for the men, and half a dozen meagerly furnished rooms for female patients, all provided with iron bedsteads, cane-seat chairs and pine tables. A *cantinière* who had retired from the service after a long sojourn in Algeria, and who was much more of a proficient in the art of mixing drinks than in the art of nursing, attended to the wants of the female patients; while the others were served by a sort of Jack-of-all-trades, who had been by turns an apothecary's clerk, a drummer in the National Guard, and a cook, and who found an ample field for his varied talents in this establishment.

The court-yards, which were three in number, strongly resembled the court-yards of a prison, for they were not only entirely destitute of verdure, but they did not even allow the patients a pleasant view, for they were inclosed by grim walls that reached nearly to the second story windows.

At one end of the large building used by the ordinary patients, rose the sharply pointed roof of a small house

which probably served as the residence of the owner of the factory in former times. It contained two bedrooms and a small parlor and dining-room—all tolerably well furnished. The windows of this secluded retreat looked out upon a small yard, where some effort had evidently been made to secure a growth of grass, while a few straggling rose-bushes and the clematis that covered the wall at the end of the yard afforded a welcome relief to the eye.

This poor attempt at a garden could be entered by a gate which opened into a vacant lot adjoining, and a covered passage-way connected the cottage with the main building.

It was to this secure place of concealment in the very heart of Paris that the crafty Frapillon had conducted Mme. de Muire and her niece. Taken there in the dead of night, in a carriage procured by Molinchard, after the dispersal of the mob, the poor ladies had not the slightest idea of the route they had followed, and so intense was the state of excitement caused by the events of that terrible night, that they felt no misgivings in regard to the possible consequences of the change they had so hastily made. Nor was there anything that was likely to excite distrust in the manner in which they had been installed in their new abode.

J. B. Frapillon had escorted them there, and after commending them to the special care of the real Dr. Molinchard, he had taken leave of them, promising to see them again the next day; and the aunt and niece retired for the night, without ever saying anything to each other about their first impressions of the place, so great was their fatigue.

It was late the next morning when Mlle. de Saint Senier awoke, a little surprised to find herself in a strange place. The events of the previous night soon recurred to her mind, however, and she dressed herself very quietly, taking care not to wake her aunt.

It was her intention to pay a visit to her old home as soon as possible, for their departure had been so hurried that a trip to the Rue de Laval was necessary to procure a

host of articles needed in their new home. Renée, who had other reasons for wishing to return to the cottage without delay, was surprised to see or hear no one moving about, and went down into the garden in the hope of meeting some one there.

To her great astonishment a profound solitude seemed to reign everywhere, and she began to survey the high walls that surrounded her on every side with a vague uneasiness and distrust, especially after she had several times called in vain the girl who had waited upon them the night before, and whose name she happened to remember.

She finally concluded that her call had not been heard, however, and said to herself that their duties in the hospital proper probably detained the attendants in the other part of the establishment; besides, the hour was sufficiently early to explain the complete solitude in which the newcomers had been left, so she cheerfully concluded to await the doctor's visit, or the arrival of one of his subordinates.

To pass away the time, she decided to explore the garden.

This did not take long, however, for the space inclosed was not more than twelve yards square.

Renée loved flowers and verdure, and the desolate and neglected air that pervaded the entire place shocked her almost as much as the sight of an invalid wasting away for want of tender care would have shocked her, for the grass seemed to have never been neither watered nor cut for a long time, branches of the rose-bushes that bordered the walks were lying untrimmed upon the ground, and the gravel paths were thickly covered with leaves. Nor was this all. Glancing around her, she noticed for the first time that the walls were high, and that the bars that protected the windows were very heavy; the fresh air and sunlight, too, that are so dear to convalescents were lacking, and this retreat for invalids seemed to her very like a prison.

To rid herself of this painful impression, she hastily returned to the rooms she had just left, for there at least

reigned a comparative comfort that might make her forget for awhile, at least, the cheerless appearance of the grounds.

Mme. de Muire was still sleeping. Renée had an opportunity to examine the little drawing-room and dining-room more closely than she had done the evening before.

The furniture was comparatively new, and the hangings fresh, but here, too, one discerned the same signs of neglect that seemed to be the distinctive feature of the place.

The sofa and chairs were covered with dust, the window-panes had become opaque for want of washing, and the imitation bronze clock on the mantel did not appear to have ever been wound. Two charred bits of wood, which had been there probably ever since the winter before, were lying in the ashes in the fire-place, and it made one shiver merely to glance at the fireless hearth.

In the dining-room, the dishes in which the frugal supper of the night before had been served, were still upon the table, and the sight of the unappetizing remnants of a hastily improvised repast contributed not a little to the dissatisfaction with her surroundings that the young girl was beginning to feel.

The luxury to which she had been accustomed from childhood had become a necessity to her, and this neglect, verging upon positive uncleanness, was revolting to her delicate organization.

But more important discoveries soon engrossed her attention. She noticed that the door leading into the main building was fastened by a heavy lock, and that the key was on the other side, so it was evident that the occupants of the cottage would be unable to leave it without the knowledge or permission of the superintendent of the establishment. It would be necessary, too, to wait until his subordinates unlocked the door, and Mlle. de Saint Senier was very naturally astonished to find her aunt and herself thus left to the mercy of a servant.

She looked around in vain for a bell-rope or an electric

bell, and becoming irritated at last by her enforced isolation, she began to pound upon the door with almost childish anger.

But this attempt to attract attention proved as futile as her previous calls, and she retraced her steps, deeply deploring the imprudence of which she had been guilty in coming to this strange house, as she walked mechanically toward the garden she had left a few moments before.

As she entered it she could not repress an exclamation of surprise, for the doctor was there, or at least the person she supposed to be the proprietor of the establishment; that is to say, J. B. Frapillon, in person.

Fresh, calm, and smiling, the pretended physician advanced toward her, hat in hand, and bowed to his new patient with all the grace acquired in the exercise of his numerous professions.

How had he gained an entrance into this court-yard, so deserted a moment before, and apparently so secure from any possible intrusion?

This was the first question that occurred to Mlle. de Saint Senier; and in the hasty glance that accompanied this thought she perceived a low gate that she had not noticed before in the vine-covered wall. This cleverly concealed opening alone gave access to the garden, so the doctor must have come, not from the hospital of which he had charge, but from without—a new discovery that struck Renée very unpleasantly.

“Permit me, mademoiselle,” he began with an obsequiousness of tone that was contradicted by the rather ironical expression in his eye, “permit me to compliment you upon the brilliancy of your coloring this morning. I see that rest and the excellent air we enjoy here have already had their effect.”

Mlle. de Saint Senier’s only reply to this compliment was a rather scornful glance.

“I must ask you, first of all, sir, to tell me where I am,” she said haughtily.

"Why, my dear young lady, you know as well as I do," replied Frapillon in pretended astonishment. "You are in my hospital at Montmartre, the Villa on the Cliffs, where, I assure you, you will receive every attention your health demands."

"You do not answer my question, sir," responded Renée, with cold firmness. "Perhaps I did not express my meaning very clearly, but I would like to know how one enters and leaves this place."

"By the door, of course, mademoiselle," answered Frapillon, impudently, seeing that any further attempt at deception would be worse than useless.

"A truce to this jesting, sir. In my agitation of yesterday I consented to an arrangement that I would have done well to weigh more carefully; and to-day I wish to regain my liberty."

"And who thinks of such a thing as depriving you of it?" exclaimed the hypocrite, clasping his hands.

"You will hardly have the audacity to try and persuade me that these walls and heavy iron bars are the usual adornments of hospitals," remarked Renée.

"But we have some very excitable patients, and for their own sakes—"

"What do you mean?" inquired Mlle. de Saint Senior, with a nervous shudder.

"Certainly nothing that affects you in any way," replied Frapillon tranquilly.

"So you will not even take the trouble to deny that we are prisoners here. I rose about an hour ago; I called, but no one came. I looked for a door, but the only one I could find was securely locked. You must admit that I have abundant grounds for complaint and for demanding an explanation of this strange state of things."

"I regret extremely that our one maid has kept you waiting, my dear young lady; but we have a good many patients, just now—

"That is immaterial, sir. Tell me how I can leave this house."

"And why do you wish to leave it?" inquired the pretended doctor after a moment's silence.

"You ask me that?" exclaimed Renée angrily. "Have you already forgotten that I consented to accompany you here on condition that I might visit the cottage on the Rue de Laval every day?"

"No, certainly not; but you would be guilty of a great imprudence if you went there to-day."

"And why, if you please?"

"Do you suppose that the attempt to force an entrance into your house last evening has created no talk in the neighborhood? Are you so unsophisticated as to suppose that the police have not been informed of the affair, and that the cottage is not under close surveillance?"

Mlle. de Saint Senier turned pale, and hung her head.

"In fact, I should not be at all surprised if the commissioner of police paid a visit to the house during the day; and I assure you that it is a very fortunate thing that you are safe here. Besides, why is it absolutely necessary for you to go to the Rue de Laval this morning?"

"I should suppose you would understand that it would be necessary for me to go there to procure clothing if for no other reason," replied Mlle. de Saint Senier, not without embarrassment.

"Of course; and it was in regard to that very matter I came to speak to you. I will cheerfully take charge of transporting here anything you may need if you will trust me with the keys of the cottage."

"Trust the keys to you? Never!" exclaimed Renée.

"I must have them, nevertheless," said Frapillon, looking the girl straight in the eye.

Frapillon was simply making an experiment in adopting this tone of command, for he had no intention of resorting to force, at least not at present.

The events that had placed the inmates of the cottage in his power were known only to Molinhard and himself, so it was possible for him to unite with Taupier and Valnoir or to operate upon his own account, as he saw fit. In the latter case, gentleness was indispensable; in the former, it might become necessary to suppress the ladies altogether, to use the hunchback's favorite expression.

In accordance with his invariable custom, Frapillon was first feeling his ground with the intention of deciding upon his tactics afterward. The attempt in this case certainly did not prove a promising one.

"You—must—have—them!" repeated Mlle. de Saint Senior, emphasizing each word as she uttered it. "I have no order to receive from you that I am aware of."

The response was accompanied by such a haughty glance that the pretended physician saw he had made a mistake.

"You misunderstand my meaning, my dear young lady," he said, in gentle tones. "I am so accustomed to talking to patients who are devoid of reason that I unconsciously express myself a little too brusquely at times. But you must not take offense, particularly as I beg you to excuse me."

Renée ignored the apology entirely. It mattered very little to her what terms Frapillon saw fit to use in addressing his patients; but one expression that he used struck her very forcibly.

The so-called superintendent of this strange establishment had just alluded to a certain class of patients the mere mention of which made the young girl shudder.

The year had been prolific in stories of arrests arbitrarily made on the plea of insanity; and Renée asked herself in terror if she could have allowed herself to be taken to a private insane asylum.

Once before, in the very beginning of the conversation, this singular physician had alluded to excitable patients, and such expressions were beginning to sound alarming.

"To what malady do you refer, sir?" she asked, determined to know the truth. "Can it be that you treat—"

"Mental diseases here? Yes, certainly, as well as physical," replied Frapillon, tranquilly.

This admission very naturally filled Renée with horror.

So she was, indeed, in a mad-house, located, she knew not where, and without any means of informing her friends of her situation, even supposing that there was any one in Paris who took an interest in her fate. The veil fell from her eyes; and it seemed to her that an insurmountable barrier had just arisen between her and the outside world.

But the very imminence of her danger gave her strength to control herself; besides, a moment's reflection made the situation appear more reassuring.

A man would not be very likely to abduct and imprison two women he had never seen before; and she had no suspicion of the real motives that had actuated Frapillon. Besides, the girl did not see that any person would gain anything by committing such a crime, so she finally persuaded herself that she had to deal with an ill-bred man whose intentions were excellent, in spite of his rough speech, and she resolved to reserve her decision and gain time, if possible.

"The close proximity of unfortunate creatures who have lost their minds always alarms and depresses me," she said, much more calmly; "and I am very much afraid that my aunt can not accustom herself to such surroundings."

"Oh, you need have no fears on that score, my dear young lady. You will never see or hear them, and you might remain here for years without even suspecting their presence."

This allusion to the possibility of a long sojourn made Mlle. de Saint Senier's blood curdle in her veins. . . .

"I hope that I shall not be put to the test," she answered, forcing a smile, "and that we shall be obliged to trespass upon your hospitality but a short time."

"The siege has only just begun, perhaps," said the pre-

tended doctor, shaking his head with the important air of a man who knows more than he is willing to tell.

"Indeed! do you really think so?" asked Renée, who could not help turning pale at the thought that the ordeal might outlast her powers of endurance.

"We still have provisions enough to last six months," replied Frapillon sententiously, though he did not believe a word of it.

"God will grant us patience and courage," murmured the girl.

"And I promise you that you shall not find life too wearisome here, mademoiselle. The first impression is not very pleasing, perhaps; but one can manage to exist; besides, there will soon be nothing to prevent you from going out occasionally."

"You will not object to that?"

"Why should I?" replied Frapillon, who had decided to adopt gentle measures. "You are not in a prison; and as soon as the Rue de Laval becomes quiet again you can pay a visit to the cottage."

"I should like to go as soon as possible," answered Mlle. de Saint Senier, somewhat reassured.

"Day after to-morrow, or to-morrow, perhaps; and I promise you that I will never ask you for your keys again."

But the scoundrel at that very moment was saying to himself:

"I shall manage to secure them without your permission, however."

"But now I think of it," he added, aloud, "I must show you how to call the servants so there may be no repetition of your unpleasant experience of this morning."

Renée, greatly reassured by this apparent frankness, thanked him with a bow; and in obedience to a gracious gesture from Frapillon, she led the way to the house.

She had scarcely crossed the threshold, when she was struck by the change that had taken place during her brief absence.

A bright fire was blazing on the hearth, the clock was going, and the dust had been carefully removed from the furniture, while through the open door leading into the dining-rooms she caught sight of a table covered with snow-white linen, and laden with glass and china.

Astonished at the quickness with which this agreeable metamorphosis had been accomplished, Renée turned to thank her companion for the orders to which this change was undoubtedly due.

But she saw no one.

Frapillon had disappeared.

Mlle. de Saint Senier's astonishment amounted to positive stupefaction.

Seized by an irresistible curiosity, she stepped back to the door, and looked out into the garden.

It was vacant.

Re-entering the house she went first to the dining-room in the hope of finding the woman who had waited on them the night before, but in this, too, she was disappointed.

Not a human soul was visible.

Bewildered and alarmed Mlle. de Saint Senier resolved to lose no time in consulting her aunt.

Mme. de Muire had not yet made her appearance, though it was long past the hour at which she usually woke.

On gently lifting the *portière* that separated the little parlor from her aunt's sleeping apartment, Renée uttered a cry of positive terror.

The bed was empty.

She sprung forward and laid her hand on the place where her aunt had lain.

The place was cold.

She glanced hastily about the chamber.

Mme. de Muire's clothing was nowhere to be seen; the toilet articles she had brought with her had also disappeared. Indeed, had it not been for the disordered bed, one would have supposed that the room had not been occu-

pied at all. Amazed and terrified by this mysterious disappearance, the girl sunk into an arm-chair, and burying her face in her hands, she tried to compose her thoughts.

The night before she had assisted her aunt, as usual, in her preparations for retiring; and Mme. de Muire, who had entirely recovered from her nervous attack, had appeared calm and even cheerful.

"You must call me early to-morrow morning, my dear child," she said, as her niece left the room, "and don't forget your visit to the Rue de Laval."

Mlle. de Saint Senier recalled every incident connected with this last interview; and her aunt's mysterious departure seemed all the more incomprehensible, especially as everything was in order, and neither the furniture nor the bed showed the slightest sign of violence.

Hence it seemed more than probable that Mme. de Muire's departure had been entirely voluntary.

But how, and at what time, had it been effected? Renée noticed that the candle which was standing upon a table by the bedside had been burned but a few moments, so her aunt must have gone to sleep immediately after their parting; and everything seemed to indicate that she had not waked until morning, consequently she had probably disappeared during Renée's conversation with the doctor in the garden; and she even had a slight suspicion that there had been a scheme to occupy her attention there and to profit by her brief absence from the house to get Mme. de Muire away.

"But how could they have taken her away?" murmured the young girl, recollecting the arrangement of the interior.

The only door that communicated with the main building opened from the dining-room, and the countess could not have passed out that way.

Unable to solve the mystery, Renée finally rose and walked slowly to the little parlor whose greatly improved appearance showed that it had certainly been visited during

her walk in the garden. At Mlle. de Saint Senier's age one takes fright quickly, but it is difficult to believe in sinister motives, and one eagerly seizes upon the slightest ray of hope, so Renée was already trying to persuade herself that Mme. de Muire's absence could be easily explained.

"The other physician must have come in," she thought, "and invited my aunt to go through the other part of the house, while the servant was putting our rooms in order."

And without pausing to reflect upon the improbable side of this reassuring hypothesis, Renée passed on into the dining-room.

There, to her great surprise, she found that the servant's attention had not been confined to laying the table. She had also brought in breakfast.

A very appetizing bird-pie occupied the place of honor in the center of the table, flanked by a plate of Dutch cheese, and a large bowl of chocolate, was smoking upon a waiter adorned with slices of delicate toast. There were also two cut-glass decanters on the table; one filled with water, the other with wine.

At that stage of the siege this was a very luxurious repast, and few Parisians enjoyed the like, especially in the by no means opulent neighborhood of Montmartre; and, however indifferent Mlle. de Saint Senier might be to the pleasures of the table, she could hardly fail to see a kindly feeling in these preparations.

"My aunt will soon return," she thought, "and the physician who accompanies her will probably explain everything satisfactorily."

So seating herself at the table, she began to indulge in all sorts of conjectures, her eyes all the while riveted upon the door through which she fully expected to see her relative enter at any moment.

It did not open, however, and though the girl listened breathlessly no sound broke the profound silence that pervaded the solitary apartment.

Ever and anon Renée fancied she heard footsteps on the other side of the partition, but on listening more attentively she was forced to admit that her imagination had deceived her.

Suddenly glancing mechanically at the neatly spread table, she perceived that the breakfast had been prepared for but one person. There was but one napkin and one glass placed beside a single plate directly in front of the chair which she was occupying, and which an unknown hand had drawn to the table.

This single plate had a frightful significance. It said more plainly than any words could have done: "You need wait for no one. You are to eat alone."

Renée understood it in an instant, and her vague alarm changed into positive terror.

It was impossible to doubt that she was the victim of some foul conspiracy now.

Mme. de Muire had probably been enticed to some other part of the house, on some plausible pretext, and shut up there away from her niece; and the unfortunate young girl saw herself condemned to an isolation, the object of which she could not understand, but whose possible consequence she could not contemplate without a shudder.

With wildly staring eyes and pallid cheeks, she sprung to her feet, and began to rush frantically about the apartments which had become suddenly transformed into a prison; but she could find no place of egress, and finally returned, as if by a sort of instinct, to this door which separated her from the second mother these scoundrels had just torn from her.

She called her frantically again and again, and in her despair at last ran out into the garden.

It was beginning to snow again, and the gray sky cast a still more gloomy tinge upon the grim walls that formed the poor captor's only horizon.

A death-like silence increased the horrors of the place,

for the sounds of the city below did not reach the lonely summit of the hill upon which Dr. Molinchard's hospital was situated.

For an instant Renée was strongly tempted to cry out, in the hope of attracting the attention of some passer-by, but she dared not.

An almost superstitious fear smothered the sound in her throat, and paralyzed her movements; and it seemed to her that these massive walls were closing in around her, burying her in a living grave.

With tottering steps, she finally succeeded in making her way back into the house. All the blood in her body seemed to have suddenly mounted to her head, and she was seized with an intolerable thirst, so staggering to the table, she poured out a glass of water, and emptied it at a single draught.

Almost instantly she experienced a most peculiar sensation.

The water was very cold, and as she drank it, her blood, too, seemed to turn cold in her veins, and she could hardly summon up strength to make her way into the parlor and throw herself upon the sofa.

To the fever that had burned in her veins a few moments before had succeeded a frightful torpor.

Her head drooped upon her breast, and her eyes would close in spite of all her efforts to keep them open. At the same time, a thousand strange fancies flitted through her brain.

She fancied she could see the curtains in the little parlor wave to and fro, and that shadowy forms were gliding about the room.

Occasionally a sudden cracking in the furniture, or in the wood-work, made her start violently; then she heard nothing save the monotonous ticking of the clock upon the mantel.

Through the profound apathy that was gradually stealing

over her, one terrible thought finally succeeded in forcing its way.

She recollected that there are such things as powerful narcotics, and passing her hand over her burning forehead, she attempted to rise, but fell back heavily and with one long-drawn sigh, the last remnant of Renée de Saint Senier's consciousness departed.

CHAPTER XI.

LATE in the afternoon of the same day on which Renée de Saint Senier fell into that strange, deep slumber; J. B. Frapillon might have been seen majestically ascending the dirty staircase that led up to the editorial rooms of the "Serpenteau."

Two or three clerks in the outer office rose respectfully on his entrance, and the alacrity of the movement was conclusive proof of the powerful influence the diplomatist of the Rue Cadet wielded in the establishment.

Frapillon walked straight through this outer office, like a man who has no time to lose, and pushed open one of the swinging-doors leading into the next room.

There he found himself in the presence of an old acquaintance, for, seated in an arm-chair, behind a large table, was M. Antoine Pilevert.

That worthy still bore upon his bearded face unmistakable traces of his mishap of the evening before. One eye was entirely concealed by the swelling produced by a heavy blow of an opponent's fist, and the bruises that disfigured his cheeks made him look not unlike the tattooed savages exhibited at country fairs.

His countenance and his attitude were both indicative of the profoundest melancholy, though a glance at the table in front of him showed that he was already endeavoring to console himself for his defeat, for upon it stood a number of empty bottles and an imposing array of pipes of divers kinds.

On seeing Frapillon the acrobat hung his head and uttered a groan of contrition; and though the new-comer's mind was engrossed by several very weighty matters, he could not help laughing at the poor wretch's crest-fallen air.

"Well, how did you finish up the evening?" Frapillon inquired, with a smile.

"You must know tolerably well, I should think," answered Pilevert, sulkily.

"Really I do not. I left you in our friend Taupier's charge, and I suppose he got you safely into port."

"He's a nice fellow, that hunchback! He pitched me into the gutter, and was the whole cause of my having to spend the night at the station-house. I've had enough of him."

"Indeed? I shall never forgive myself for having left you so unceremoniously, my dear Monsieur Pilevert. But tell me, how did you get out of the scrape?"

"Your hunchback is such a hard-looking customer that the officer thought strongly of sending us both to jail, and I'm almost sure he would have done it if Monsieur Valnoir had not interfered in our behalf."

"Well, I'm glad to see you out again, safe and sound," remarked Frapillon, who had learned all he wished to know.

"Safe and sound, with a black eye! It seems to me that I've got a lead hat on my head, and a wooden throat this morning."

"Oh! you'll soon get over that, my friend, you'll soon get over that. But I must leave you now, for I expect Monsieur Valnoir is waiting for me."

"Yes; they're all in there, and they've been inquiring for you."

Frapillon quietly opened the door and stepped into the next room. This was usually reserved for the exclusive use of Valnoir, who, as editor-in-chief, enjoyed the privilege of isolating himself completely when the fancy seized him, so the visitor was not a little surprised to find his friend the center of quite a little group.

To the right of his arm-chair sat Taupier, and on the left sat Mlle. de Charmière, like two associate judges, while behind them towered the tall form of Alcindor, and they all wore a rather solemn air that instantly attracted the attention of Frapillon, for he was not accustomed to see any of these persons in a serious mood.

Requested in a note from Valnoir to drop into the office of the "Serpenteau" about three o'clock that afternoon, he had expected to be greeted with jests and shouts of laughter, but a single glance at the party convinced him that a storm was brewing, and he governed himself accordingly.

He began by shaking hands with the three gentlemen, and gallantly kissing the tips of Mlle. de Charmière's fingers; then seating himself astride a chair, and leaning both elbows on the desk, he glanced up at Valnoir, and asked:

"Well, my dear fellow, what progress have we made since last Saturday?"

"There has been an increase of about thirty-five hundred in our circulation," said the editor-in-chief, coldly.

"Bravo! That shows how thoroughly the public appreciate articles of sterling merit. Your last article on the regular army was worth its weight in diamonds. Five or six more like it and the circulation of the paper will be doubled."

"To say nothing of the *feuilleton* I began day before yesterday," remarked Taupier. "The title alone is good for twenty thousand additional subscribers."

"And my series of articles in which I explain the doctrine of fusionism will increase the sale at least thirty thousand more," remarked Alcindor, gravely.

"Thirty thousand and twenty thousand make fifty thousand," remarked Frapillon, with the utmost seriousness. "This, added to the number of copies now sold, will make a circulation of at least one hundred thousand. If the siege lasts three months longer we shall all be millionaires."

Valnoir, who was the more conscious of the covert irony of this remark from the fact that he knew the exact value of these gentlemen's lucubrations, lost no time in diverting the conversation into another channel.

"My dear fellow," he remarked, with an air of pretended carelessness, "I asked you to drop in so we might be able to talk over some matters in which we are all quite as much interested as in the circulation of the '*Serpenteau*.'"

"I can guess, I think. You are anxious to hear how the Saint Senier affair is progressing, I suppose."

Valnoir nodded.

"Very well, but Taupier can tell you all about the latest developments just as well as I can."

"I?" exclaimed the hunchback. "Why, I know nothing about what has occurred since you managed to give me the slip last evening."

"Nor am I able to give you any further information on the subject, for there have been no new developments since the arrest of the servant who, thanks to my exertions, has been safely lodged in prison for an indefinite period."

"But how about the young lady you started in pursuit of when you left me?" demanded the hunchback.

"I lost sight of her, and it was impossible for me to find her again," answered Frapillon, with unblushing effrontery. Rose, Valnoir, and Taupier all exchanged glances, whose meaning was apparent to the shrewd man of affairs.

It was very evident that they suspected him of acting on his own account, and these suspicions were, of course, the result of certain insinuations on the part of the hunchback.

"It is very fortunate that I lost no time," he thought.

Then he added, aloud:

"I don't see why you should feel any uneasiness. The worst part of the job is accomplished, as all the men are safely out of the way, and it seems to me that you haven't much to fear from two lone women."

"Women are more dangerous than men," remarked Mlle. de Charmière.

"I believe you are right," remarked Frapillon, with an equivocal smile.

"Besides, this is not the matter in which we are most deeply interested to-day," interrupted Valnoir.

"What is it, then?"

"I have been requested to speak to you by several members of our society."

"Do you mean the 'Society of the Moon with the Teeth?'"

"Precisely."

"Very well. What is it you would like to know?" inquired Frapillon, with unruffled calmness.

There was a moment's silence; then, encouraged by a glance from his lady-love, Valnoir replied:

"Well, you see, my dear fellow, the society has been in existence about three months. There is a very large number of members, and this number is constantly increasing, consequently, small as is the weekly assessment, levied upon each member, the aggregate must mount up to a very considerable figure."

"Very considerable," interrupted Frapillon, in a frigid tone.

"The amount of which we know only approximately," continued Valnoir, rather disconcerted by this coolness. "You have been the sole receiver of these funds, and you alone are responsible for them, as you have had undisputed control of them from the first."

"All this is perfectly true. What are you driving at?"

"Ah, well, we all know that profound secrecy is one of the fundamental principles of our society, still—"

"Well?" asked Frapillon, calmly adjusting his spectacles.

"Well, we think that it would be not only eminently proper, but desirable to issue occasional statements of our financial condition and—"

"In short, you would like me to produce the accounts of the society."

"I need not tell you that we do not feel the slightest doubt of your integrity, and that we have implicit confidence in you," Valnoir hastened to add.

"It seems so, certainly."

"Besides, we are not the persons who ask this information."

"Indeed?" exclaimed Frapillon, with a rather incredulous air.

"No, but I have received letters from five or six parties, who express a desire to become enlightened on the subject, and being unable to furnish the desired information myself, I am obliged to apply to you."

"Who are these curious persons, if I may ask?"

"Why, members of the society, of course; and I think I had better tell you that the subject will probably be brought up for discussion at our next meeting."

"And you tell me so I may be prepared for it. This is certainly very kind in you."

"It seems only fair, and I certainly hope you will not take offense."

"On the contrary, I am greatly obliged to you for giving me an opportunity I have long desired."

"I don't understand. Explain more clearly, if you please."

"It is hardly worth while now. I will follow your advice and reserve my explanation for our next meeting."

Valnoir's friends, and particularly Mlle. de Charmière, seemed to be listening to this conversation with the liveliest interest, and it was very evident that this little scene had been planned in advance. Frapillon knew Valnoir's careless and unsuspecting nature too well to attribute this attack to him, but he was unable to decide whether it was Taupier or the fair Rose who had instigated it.

Both of them seemed quite capable of this shabby trick, and he mentally resolved to make them sorry for it.

"Suppose you will allow me to see the letters you mentioned just now," he remarked to Valnoir, with admirably feigned indifference.

"I—I hardly know what I have done with them," stammered the editor-in-chief, thoroughly disconcerted.

"All right, all right! I understand perfectly," responded Frapillon. You are afraid of compromising your fellow members."

Valnoir, whose embarrassment was increasing, tried in vain to find a response.

An incident for which all present were utterly unprepared extricated him from his dilemma.

The sound of angry voices was suddenly heard in the adjoining room; and as they rose higher and higher it soon became impossible to mistake the cause of disturbance. Pilevert was the only person in the house capable of carrying on a conversation in such a tone, and however anxious Valnoir might be to settle the question now under discussion in his office, he could not remain indifferent to the disputes of his subordinates.

Pilevert had been selected by the prudent Taupier to listen to all complaints, and up to the present time he had performed his task to the satisfaction of all. His formidable aspect usually calmed the wrath of such visitors as presented themselves with grievances, and if they proved too troublesome the ex-professor of fencing offered them the choice of weapons.

Since he had entered upon his functions he had encountered no one who seemed inclined to carry things with a very high hand, and this fact had contributed very considerably to the development of his coarseness and insolence, so much so, indeed, that the editor-in-chief of the "Serpenteau" was beginning to think that his body-guard defended him too energetically, and that it would be necessary to call him to order.

This time the wrath of the responsible editor outside

seemed so frightfully violent that Valnoir started up as if with the intention of going himself to see what was the matter, but a glance from Mlle. de Charmière reminded him that prudence is one of the first duties of a politician. He was about to turn to Taupier and request him to settle a dispute whose cause he suspected, for his articles had been so virulent for several days past, and had hit so hard right and left, that he had reason to anticipate numerous quarrels; but Frapillon, who had his reasons for desiring to put an end to this interview in which his associates so plainly evinced their intention of hauling him over the coals, eagerly availed himself of this opportunity to make his escape.

"I think I had better go and quiet our body-guard down a little," he remarked, stepping to the door.

"Remember that Valnoir can not see any one."

The remark of the lovely Rose was accompanied by this course injunction from Taupier:

"Be quick about it, then, and come right back. We are not done with you yet."

"Give me time to add a little water to Master Pilevert's wine, and I am at your service," replied Frapillon.

When he had carefully closed the door that protected Valnoir's sanctum from profane intrusion, Frapillon found himself in the presence of an intensely excited group.

Pilevert, intrenched behind the table, which he seemed inclined to use as a sort of barricade, had planted himself firmly upon his short legs, and was evidently preparing for a fight.

The two strangers in front of him appeared no less exasperated. One, who was very young, and clad in the uniform of a captain of infantry, was grasping the hilt of his sword with one hand, and twirling his mustache with the other, all the while casting furious glances at Pilevert.

The other, who was considerably older, but equally angry, did not belong to the army; but he was very pale and held

a crumpled copy of the "Serpenteau" in his clinched hand.

The cause of the disturbance was too apparent to require any explanation; nevertheless, Frapillon, assuming the most innocent air imaginable, inquired with great solicitude:

"What is the matter, gentlemen?"

Though the question was addressed more particularly to the gentleman in citizen's clothing it was the young officer who took it upon himself to reply.

"This scoundrel seems inclined to be insolent, and I propose to give him a lesson in good manners."

"Come on, you young peacock, come on!" roared Pilevert, rubbing his hands excitedly.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, calm yourselves, and explain, I beg of you," exclaimed Frapillon, magnanimously throwing himself between the two furious men.

Then, touching the acrobat on the shoulder, he added:

"Do me the favor to keep quiet for a moment, my dear Pilevert. You are too hasty."

These few words sufficed to moderate the wrath of the irascible Antoine, who seemed to stand in wholesome awe of the suave cashier.

"You may think it very fine to be called a clown and a blackguard, but I don't," growled the acrobat, assuming a less aggressive attitude, however.

"I can hardly believe that these gentlemen would insult you without cause," said Frapillon, gently, "and I should therefore like to know—"

"I will tell you what has passed, sir," said the elder of the two visitors, "and I trust that you will put an end to this disgraceful scene by making the just reparation we demand. You are connected with the editorial staff of this paper, I suppose?"

"I am one of its founders," replied Frapillon, evasively.

"Then you will not be surprised to learn that several

articles which have recently appeared in your journal have deeply wounded and incensed all who have the honor to belong to the French army, and that an officer now comes to demand satisfaction in the name of all his comrades."

"This sensibility is highly creditable to him, certainly, still—"

"Allow me to finish, if you please. My friend here, who is a captain in one of the regiments you insult every day, has requested me to act as his second, and I have consented to do so all the more willingly from the fact that my acquaintance with your editor-in-chief, Monsieur Valnoir, is one of no recent date."

"Ah!" exclaimed Frapillon, whose attention was instantly attracted by this last remark.

"So it is with Monsieur Valnoir alone that we had business, and when we were received here by this—by this man, who had the impudence to pretend that he was the writer of the offensive articles in question, you can hardly wonder, I think, that our patience deserted us."

"Yes, it is going a little too far, I think," exclaimed the officer, "when a man insults people, and then employs common prize-fighters to represent him on the field of honor."

"Gentlemen, I assure you that there is some deplorable mistake about all this. My friend Valnoir is a man of honor, and he would not shrink from a duel."

"I know that," replied the civilian, in a tone that furnished Frapillon with abundant food for reflection.

For several minutes he had been wondering if this was simply the result of some of the "Serpenteau's" venomous attacks, or whether it was in some way connected with the Saint Senier affair. In the latter case he was personally interested in the matter, and it behooved him to ascertain the truth, if possible.

"Monsieur Valnoir is not in just now, gentlemen," he began; "but if you will be kind enough to leave your cards

I will hand them to him on his return, and explain the object of your visit."

The two strangers exchanged glances, then the elder of the two said, curtly:

"That is not necessary. We must see Monsieur Valnoir in person, and I wish you would say to him that we will call again at the same hour to-morrow." ●

"And I expect to find him next time," added the officer, with an emphasis that convinced Frapillon that he would be held accountable for the delivery of the message.

"You may rest assured that I shall not forget, gentlemen," stammered the cashier, not a little disconcerted to see the visitors turn their backs on him without any explanation whatever.

They had left the room before Frapillon recovered from his dismay, but he was aroused from his fit of abstraction by the voice of Pilevert saying:

"Good riddance! I hope I may never have the pleasure of seeing either of you again."

The time had come for the wily diplomatist of the Rue Cadet to choose between the legion of wires he had been manipulating for some time.

It took him only a moment to decide.

"What do you say, my dear Pilevert, to a nice dinner at Baratte's, where we can be sure of a good bottle of wine, as well as a good dinner."

"That would suit me to a 'T,'" replied the acrobat, "for my throat is as dry as tinder."

"Let us be off, then, and at once," said Frapillon, for he had no desire to re-enter the council chamber over which his friend Valnoir was presiding.



THE RED BAND.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE cold, dark December night—the same on which the Saint Senier ladies left the cottage—a man and a woman were hastening along a narrow path in the forest of Saint Germain.

The man was clad in the garb of a common peddler, with a pack on his back, and a staff in his hand; and the woman seemed to be acting as an assistant, for she carried her part of the merchandise in a long bag suspended from her waist; still, if a person had observed the faces and bearing of those nocturnal travelers closely, he might have had some doubts concerning their real condition in life.

In spite of his burden, his blue blouse, corduroy trousers, and clumsy hobnailed shoes, the man's gait was not that of a peddler. He walked with the firm measured tread of a soldier, and not with the dragging step of a *colporteur* who has more than time to reach his destination before the next fair opens. His face was even less in harmony with his costume and apparent calling, for his dark and rather emaciated countenance was characterized by a delicacy and firmness of outline that would have led one to suppose him something better than a common peddler. But for the entire absence of beard and mustache, it was the face of a soldier, and even of an officer.

The woman, though she wore a coarse linsey skirt and *sabots*, looked as unlike a peasant as he did. Her lithe form was concealed by a large, striped cloak, and her luxuriant black hair was hidden by a red handkerchief, knotted about her head in the Creole fashion, but the graceful lines

of her figure were apparent as she walked, and her eyes were too brilliant, her complexion too fair, and her profile too delicate and pure, to escape the notice of a keen observer.

The two travelers walked swiftly on, without exchanging a word, and, strange to say, the woman seemed to be acting as guide for her companion.

She led the way, pausing from time to time, as if to ascertain whether or not she was following the right course, then hastening on again. The man followed in silence, and these short halts were silent ones—a gesture of the hand, a nod of the head before resuming their journey—these were all that passed between them; and, judging from the precaution they were taking, and their persistent silence, the two travelers must have realized the necessity of maintaining the most profound secrecy; and, in fact, the forest was so little frequented at that time, especially during the night, that their mere presence in such a place, and at such an hour, made them appear highly suspicious characters.

The Prussians, who had been occupying Saint Germain for more than three months, had not failed to take their usual precautions. From the very beginning of their occupation of the place, the magnificent trees that bordered the main avenue had been ruthlessly destroyed to construct intrenchments and obstruct the roads.

After the investiture of the capital was completed, the prudent enemy did not confine themselves to those preparations for defense; patrols traversed the forest in every direction, to say nothing of the outposts which had been placed there with that accurate knowledge of the topography of the country which the Prussians had shown from the very beginning of the war.

But toward the close of the siege, their surveillance, though as active as ever at the front, was considerably relaxed in the rear.

Three months earlier, these travelers would have been

almost sure to fall into an ambushade before they had ventured a hundred yards into the forest, and their journey would have been interrupted so quickly that they probably would not have undertaken it. But in this less critical period of the siege they had a fair chance of succeeding in their undertaking if they exercised a tolerable amount of caution, and knew their way, especially as the weather was favorable to such an expedition, for the ground was covered with a light snow that deadened the sound of their footsteps, and the wind was blowing a gale.

On such a night it was not likely that any sentinel would stand motionless at his post, and the stamping which he would be obliged to keep up in order to escape freezing would be heard some distance.

After pursuing their way without accident for some time, the peddler and his companion reached a part of the forest where the ground became more and more uneven, and they were obliged to slacken their pace.

The tall branches of the giant trees formed a dome over the path, and intercepted the dim light that fell from the clouded sky, and in this obscurity the gnarled roots that obstructed the narrow path assumed all sorts of grotesque shapes. Still, far from being daunted by these difficulties, the fair guide seemed to advance with a no less confident tread. Indeed, judging by her manner, she was well acquainted with this locality, for she paused occasionally to examine a stump or a large rock, as if seeking some familiar landmark.

Her companion followed her closely, regulating his pace by hers, and each time she paused she glanced over her shoulder, and, by a hasty gesture, gave the man to understand that she knew the way, whereupon he accepted the tacit invitation addressed to him, and followed her without a word.

In proportion as they advanced, the travelers redoubled their prudence and attention. Indeed, there was even a

moment when the woman stopped short, and stood motionless in the middle of the path. This was at the foot of a stony ascent bordered on each side by deep ditches, a spot so peculiar in its appearance that once seen it was not likely to be forgotten.

The guide evidently recognized this spot where it would be difficult for a vehicle of any sort to pass without overturning, and possibly she wished to call attention to some accident of this kind, for she began to gesticulate with great animation, pointing to one of the ditches and leaning over upon one side, as if to imitate a falling vehicle.

The man nodded as if to show that he understood, but still uttered never a word.

After this halt, the woman evinced no further hesitation, but hastened on with a firm, even step, and it was evident that she considered herself nearly at her journey's end.

After a rapid walk of about ten minutes, the pair reached a small open space in the center of which stood a guide-post, whose inscription, of course, could not be seen in the darkness.

The woman, however, called her companion's attention to the guide-post, and this time he remarked, very distinctly:

"Yes; this is the Etoile du Chêne Capitaine, unquestionably."

Either she did not hear him, or she did not deem it advisable to reply, for she again hastened on in silence.

About a hundred yards further on, near the edge of a broad road, was a clearing whose center was marked by a colossal tree.

The woman paused and pointed to it.

"Yes; there it is!" said the man, in a smothered voice.

The clearing in front of which the two travelers had just paused was the same in which Commander de Saint Senier had fallen in an unfairly conducted duel three months before, though this portion of the forest had undergone a

marked change since that time, and the woman who pointed out this giant of the forest to her companion must certainly have been here before, and had good reasons for returning to the spot.

The man, on the contrary, seemed to find himself in these wilds for the first time, though the exclamation that had just escaped him indicated that the sight of this deserted spot awakened many painful recollections.

All this proved beyond a doubt that the two travelers were not what they appeared to be.

In fact, the pretended peddler was Roger de Saint Senior; his companion was no other than Regina, and the night was the first night of a flight fraught with a thousand dangers.

Duty alone could have drawn them to this part of the forest, for the route they were following did not take them any further from the Prussian lines, and when morning dawned they were likely to find themselves in a position of the greatest peril; whereas, they might have taken advantage of the long December night to make their way through the heavily wooded district that extends toward the departments of Lower Normandy.

After a moment of reflection and careful scrutiny, the young girl seemed to have discovered what she was seeking, for she touched her companion lightly on the arm, and motioned him to follow her; then, walking to a spot five or six yards to the right of the big oak, she stamped upon the ground and pointed to one particular spot, clearly expressing by this pantomime a desire that her companion instantly understood.

Removing his pack from his back, he set it down under a tree and began to open it. Though it was not quite so dark since they had left the dense forest, it was very difficult to detect any difference in the appearance of the surface of the earth, covered as it was by a thin mantle of snow; still, by feeling it with the hands, one became con-

scious of certain inequalities of surface which seemed to follow a straight line, as if the layer of sod had not united entirely after being removed. There was no longer any chance for doubt. This was certainly the place where the earth had been disturbed by Valnoir and his accomplice, Taupier, the night before the duel, and here one must dig if one wished to discover the secret buried at the base of the tree; and it was evidently for that purpose that the two fugitives had come.

Roger drew a small mattock from his pack, and, stepping to Regina's side, began work with the utmost zeal. The first blow broke the crust of snow, and disclosing to view the ground it covered, confirmed the justice of Regina's statement, for the turf had evidently been cut with a spade and replaced.

This certainly increased the zeal of Roger, who continued to dig vigorously. He was very strong, and his muscular arm plied the pick with so much force that quite an opening was soon made, in spite of the strong resistance offered by the frozen soil; but though he had plenty of strength and good-will, he was absolutely wanting in experience, and, consequently, labored under a great disadvantage; and in proportion as the depth of the hole increased, the work became more laborious.

Regina aided him to the best of her ability, scooping the dirt out and seizing the rough stones with her delicate hands, and throwing them out of the hole with surprising strength and skill; but in spite of their united efforts, Roger at the end of a half hour had dug only about a foot, and seemed greatly fatigued. The girl, noticing this fact, motioned him to rest a moment, and both seated themselves on the edge of the hole.

Roger looked around him with the abstracted gaze of a person absorbed in deep thought. Now and then the rustling of the dry leaves or the cracking of a branch made him start, and he turned hastily to see if anything was

moving in the undergrowth; but as soon as he perceived that it was a false alarm, he again relapsed into a profound reverie.

After resting about ten minutes he resumed work with such feverish eagerness that he soon very nearly reached the depth at which the object—whatever it was—must have been buried.

Regina ceased to assist him. She seemed to fear any contact with the object buried there.

Soon an involuntary exclamation escaped Roger. His mattock had just struck some hard substance that emitted a dull, hollow sound.

The young man was about to strike another blow, when Regina suddenly touched him on the shoulder.

He paused, with arm uplifted, to glance around him.

A light was gleaming through the trees to the left of them.

The pick fell from Roger's hands.

It would be difficult to imagine a more annoying *contre-temps*.

The object buried there was concealed from him only by a thin layer of earth. Another moment, and it would be disclosed to view; but this moment was not at his disposal, for the light was rapidly approaching—disappearing one instant, only to reappear the next—conclusive proof that it was in the hands of some person who was walking through the forest.

Roger perceived all this in the twinkling of an eye, and instantly decided that he was in the presence of the night patrol, and the forest guards, having long since taken their departure, the persons approaching must be Prussians—a fact that complicated the situation very considerably.

To leave the spot without completing an undertaking for which the fugitives had risked their freedom, and perhaps their lives, was hard indeed! But, on the other hand, if they decided to remain, they would not only run a great

risk of capture, but also of delivering up the secret to the German soldiers.

Roger, though greatly perplexed, realized the necessity of immediate action, for he could already hear the dry branches crack under the heavy and monotonous tread of the approaching enemy, who were evidently making their way straight toward the clearing.

The young officer turned to consult his companion in danger; but a single glance showed him that she had already decided upon their course, for she was trampling down and leveling the freshly stirred earth with her tiny feet.

"She is right!" thought Roger. "We must fill up the hole as well as we can, so the Prussians will not notice it, and then we will hide in the underbrush until after they have taken their departure."

This was evidently the plan formed by Regina, for she hastily caught up her long bag, and Roger followed her example by shouldering his pack.

The young girl, resuming her duties as guide, crept stealthily toward a bunch of young chestnut-trees on the side of the clearing opposite that from which the Prussians were approaching, and Roger followed her, still clutching the mattock which might serve as a weapon of defense in case of need. The refuge which Regina had chosen was probably the same that had served her as a hiding-place on the morning of the duel, and it was well adapted for this purpose, for a dense growth of vines and briers formed an almost impenetrable net-work about the base of the trees.

The advancing squad of Prussians, numbering seven or eight men, was already in sight. The bearer of the lantern, who was probably the corporal, walked at the head of his little band, and after pausing an instant to give a brief order, led them straight toward the big oak-tree.

A feeling of profound consternation took possession of the hearts of both fugitives. The skill of the Prussian sol-

diers in discovering hidden treasures had become proverbial, and it seemed well-nigh impossible that the excavation Roger had just made would escape their keen eyes.

At the command of the corporal, the guns were stacked, and the soldiers began to stamp their feet and beat their arms to warm themselves, while their leader laid down his musket and lantern, and proceeded to light an immense pipe.

Was this to be a short halt, or were they going to encamp here?

This was soon decided beyond a doubt.

One German began to collect a large pile of withered leaves and dry branches, another struck a light, and the remaining members of the squad dispersed to cut wood in the clearing while the corporal stood guard over the weapons.

There was no longer any chance for doubt. The detachment was going into camp here for the rest of the night, and they seemed to have chosen the spot simply because the enormous tree furnished not only a shelter from the wind, but a back-log for their fire-place. Under these circumstances, the wisest course for the officer and the young girl to pursue was to remain in their hiding-place until the enemy concluded to take their departure. Any attempt to escape would be imprudent in the extreme, for the Prussians were probably on the alert, and the slightest sound would set them on the fugitives' track; besides, if the excavation should escape the notice of the soldiers, there was a possibility of resuming the work interrupted by their unexpected appearance upon the scene of action.

Roger was soon aroused from these reflections by the unpleasant proximity of a Prussian who had approached their hiding-place in pursuit of fuel. In fact, Roger not only heard and saw him, but smelled him, for the pungent odor of strong tobacco-smoke was wafted by the breeze through the tangled net-work of vines and briars; but the young

officer soon saw the man making his way toward the big oak, where his comrades had already collected the material for a respectable camp-fire.

Suddenly a bright light burst forth in the forest about twenty yards from the fugitives' hiding-place.

"Fire!" muttered Roger, in the utmost consternation.

The Prussian, in lighting his pipe, must have dropped a burning match upon one of the little piles of dry leaves that strewed the ground, and from that the fire had spread to some of the rushes or tiny branches lying close by.

The cold, freezing weather which had prevailed since the first of November, had expelled every particle of dampness from the wood, and it burned as freely as in midsummer. Long tongues of flame shot up through the branches, and the north wind blew the smoke straight toward the neighboring thicket.

The situation of Roger and his companion was becoming still more critical. They glanced at each other anxiously, and if they had been able to give utterance to their thoughts, it is more than probable that they would have asked each other if it was not advisable for them to flee, though such an attempt had become even more perilous from the fact that the light of the fire could hardly fail to attract the attention of the Prussians to this immediate neighborhood.

Already they were beginning to laugh boisterously, and to utter exclamations of delight. To see a French forest burn was a most welcome diversion, and it was not at all likely that they would make any effort to extinguish the fire. On the contrary, there was great reason to fear that they would feel a desire to contemplate the pleasant sight more closely, and, in that case, the fugitives would certainly be discovered.

Besides, the fire having made rapid progress for the past few moments, Roger soon perceived that the place would be tenable only a short time. In fact, the heat and smoke

were already becoming intolerable. The Prussians, on the contrary, had nothing to fear, as the clearing was too large for the fire to reach the tree that stood in the middle of it.

Roger motioned Regina to hold herself in readiness to flee, if necessary, and set her the example by shouldering his pack. The girl rose, and, without showing the slightest sign of fear, picked up her lag, and calmly awaited the moment that was to decide their fate.

The light from the fire streamed full upon the group of Prussians. They had ceased to occupy themselves with preparations for their bivouac, probably thinking that their fire would cut but a sorry figure beside the colossal conflagration, and now stood leaning tranquilly against the big oak, enjoying the sight of this destruction, and pointing out the progress of the flames to one another.

One feature of the disaster seemed to engross their attention particularly. In the midst of the burning underbrush stood a solitary birch-tree whose smooth white bark gave it very much the appearance of a gigantic wax-candle. They were all watching the tongues of flame as they licked this bark, and made their way up to the tall branches, transforming them into sparkling girandoles, and each branch, as it fell into the fiery furnace below, emitted a shower of sparks that called forth exclamations of delight from the lookers-on.

Roger, too, watched the effect of the fire upon the birch as attentively as the Prussians, but with very different emotions, for the tree, thus undermined at its base, must soon fall, and the copse that protected them not being outside the radius of its fall, a new and grave danger threatened the fugitives.

If the tree fell toward them, they were almost sure to be crushed beneath the weight of the incandescent mass; and even if they escaped this peril, the burning tree could hardly fail to set fire to the brush around them.

Already it was tottering upon its base, and one could pretty nearly calculate the minutes that would elapse before the catastrophe.

Roger did not fear for himself. When he came to help defend Paris with his company, he had resigned himself to the sacrifice of his life, and from the very beginning of the siege he had passed through so many imminent dangers that he had learned to regard death with indifference; but he could not bear the thought of seeing the young girl who had so generously come to his assistance perish with him. If he could have insured Regina's safety by surrendering himself to the Prussians, Roger would not have hesitated; but events had united their destinies so closely that they were doomed to perish together unless God came to the relief of both.

Besides, the heroic girl gave no signs of fear, but gazed calmly at her companion; and there was such firmness and composure in her manner that the young officer almost reproached himself for his weakness.

As he was about to make a well-nigh impossible attempt to escape he heard three whistles repeated at regular intervals, and fancied he heard at the same time a sound whose nature no soldier could mistake.

It was the measured tramp, tramp of advancing troops. The explanation instantly occurred to Roger.

The light of the fire had been noticed by the guards stationed in the forest, and a large detachment had been dispatched in hot haste to the scene of the conflagration, and the whistle had been sounded by the corporal who felt obliged to give notice of his presence in the clearing.

The last hope of the fugitives faded. The detachment that was approaching would unquestionably join the Prussians encamped under the big oak, and having joined them, they would all unite to hew down the surrounding trees, and in this way extinguish the fire, in which case their hiding-place would be surrounded.

Roger pressed his companion's arm, and pointed to the clearing, as if to say:

"Will you brave the bullets and flee in this direction?"

Regina nodded as if to signify to her companion that she was ready.

There was not a second to lose, and Roger took the girl's hand with the intention of rushing with her from their hiding-place, but just then a sharp crackling resounded behind him, and made him turn.

A brand transported by the wind had just set fire to the thicket behind them, but very fortunately there were only a few rushes and briars at the spot where the blazing brand had fallen.

Roger stifled an exclamation of joy, for this fire might open a way of escape by destroying the net-work of briars and vines that imprisoned them. Still, it would take time to accomplish this, and the birch might fall at any moment. The lives of two human beings depended upon the strength of a tree that had been burning nearly an hour.

While Roger was watching the progress of the devouring element with intense anxiety, the loud tramp, tramp of approaching soldiery warned him that the Prussians were about to appear.

Twenty seconds passed, perhaps; then there came a frightful cracking sound, the precursor of the fall, and the tree began to lean slowly to one side.

At the same instant the head of the Prussian column appeared on the opposite side of the clearing. There were probably about one hundred men, led by an officer, and they announced their arrival by a loud hurrah.

It was fortunate that the fugitives in the thicket did not find their escape cut off by the enemy, but their situation was by no means encouraging, especially as the fire illuminated the surrounding forest so brilliantly that every object was as plainly visible as at midday.

Roger saw the officer in command of the detachment

that had just come up gesticulate excitedly as he issued an order, and saw the soldiers form into platoons, hatchet in hand. Evidently they were only awaiting further orders to begin the work of extinguishing the fire.

"Are you ready?" whispered Roger, forgetting in his anxiety that Regina could not hear him.

But his gesture was so significant that the young girl took a step forward.

"Forward!" cried the Prussian officer.

This was the moment for which Roger had been waiting.

Placing the girl behind him, so as to shelter her with his own body, he bowed his head upon his breast, and dashed through the flames.

The space to be traversed was slight, but the peril was great, for it was necessary to run over live coals and part the blazing branches that impeded their progress. The undertaking would have seemed utterly impracticable under ordinary circumstances, but imminent danger generally increases one's courage.

Roger, who was naturally clever and agile, successfully accomplished the double feat of traversing the fiery furnace and protecting his companion. He reached a neighboring path with no other accident than a slight burn on his left hand, and on turning he saw Regina beside him, safe and sound.

At the very instant he set foot upon a spot which the flames had not yet reached the birch-tree fell with a frightful crash, covering with its burning branches the very place the fugitives had just left. Two dangers—that of fire and discovery by the enemy had been avoided at the same time.

But if they paused even long enough to take breath they ran a great risk of losing the fruit of their late venture, so the lieutenant seized Regina's hand and dragged her into the woods that bordered the path.

They had hardly proceeded ten yards, however, when three soldiers suddenly appeared on their right. The young

girl was the first to discover them, and hastily springing to one side, she began to run with all her might in the opposite direction.

Roger executed the same manœuver with great presence of mind and agility, but he was too late.

Quick as was the movement, the Prussians were so near and the woods so brightly lighted by the fire, that the fugitives were perceived.

"Halt!" cried the Prussians.

They did not wait to see if the order would be obeyed, however. On the contrary, then and there began a frantic chase in which the soldiers had every advantage.

Still, neither Regina nor Roger lost courage. They had understood each other at a glance, and they now ran along, side by side, turning occasionally to see if the number of pursuers had increased.

If the rest of the hostile band took part in the pursuit it was all over with the fugitives; if not there was a slight chance of their making their escape.

After a few moments, Roger became convinced that the rest of the detachment was engaged in extinguishing the fire, and not in pursuing them, while the three soldiers that an unlucky chance had set upon their track had no guns, and consequently were unable to send a bullet after them.

This was encouraging, and the lieutenant was already thinking that in case of a hand-to-hand struggle his mattock, if energetically wielded, might prove of no little service to him, though it was scarcely the weapon one would have selected to parry the blows of three German axes.

Unfortunately, the forest in which this trial of speed took place was becoming much less dense, and this was a decided disadvantage to the fugitives. Much more agile in their movements than their pursuers, they took advantage of every natural obstacle, but in an open country it would be more difficult to elude the enemy. Already the Prussians had stumbled over a stone or a root more than once,

and each time this mishap had enabled the fugitives to increase the distance between them and their pursuers.

Regina did not appear at all fatigued, and Roger, noticing the fact, almost envied her her powers of endurance, for he felt that he could not hold out much longer himself.

Soon they reached a clump of ash-trees that marked the edge of the wood. Beyond stretched a clearing much more extensive than that of the giant oak, and still further on a broad road opened in the forest.

In the center of this clearing was a small pond, and toward this the girl unhesitatingly darted, first touching the arm of her companion as if to warn him to be on his guard. At that moment the Prussians were not more than twenty yards behind them, and the fugitives could hear them inciting one another to greater exertions by guttural exclamations.

The little ice-covered pond was traversed in the twinkling of an eye, and less than a moment afterward Roger had the unspeakable satisfaction of hearing a significant cracking sound behind him, followed by a volley of excited oaths. The three Prussians had reached the edge of the pond at the same moment, and rushing upon it simultaneously, their heavy boots had broken the thin coating of ice that covered the slimy water, and the fugitives, turning, saw them immersed nearly to their waists, and making all sorts of frantic efforts to regain their footing.

•Although the sight was a most agreeable one, Roger did not stop to enjoy it, but rushed on with redoubled swiftness across the rest of the clearing with his companion; and when they reached the edge of the wood again their enemies were still floundering in the mire into which the young girl's *ruse* had led them.

The road that now opened before the fugitives was such a broad one that they felt sure it led to some city or at least to a village. It was consequently to be avoided, and

Regina, who seemed to know the country perfectly, darted into a side path. After a few moments of rapid walking they reached a large rock, behind which rose the thatched roof of a tiny hut, to which Regina called her companion's attention, and Roger, being almost ready to drop with fatigue, instantly decided to avail himself of the shelter thus providentially provided.

"Who's that?" cried a man's voice, just as the fugitives were about to cross the threshold.

Roger started back, dragging Regina with him. The hut was evidently occupied, and the fact was certainly a most unfortunate one, for, situated as the young officer was, every meeting was attended with danger, and every stranger must be regarded as an enemy.

With a rapid movement he freed himself of his pack, and even had the presence of mind to throw it down in front of him, so it might serve as a stumbling-block to the enemy, then, raising his pick, stood ready to strike.

Regina seemed to understand their peril, and leaving her companion perfect freedom of movement she turned as if to face the danger that would threaten them in the rear in case the Prussians had succeeded in tracking them.

The night was dark, and the gloom was augmented by the large trees whose branches formed a sort of dome over the hut, so the occupant of this rustic abode was invisible. As yet the only evidence of his presence had been that gruff "Who's that?" and Roger asked himself anxiously who it could be.

Was it merely some wood-cutter who had sought here a refuge from the cold, or a spy?

Either conjecture was equally plausible. One thing, however, was certain, the individual thus surprised had spoken in French, and without the slightest accent, so Roger finally decided to risk the traditional reply:

"A friend!"

The stranger did not seem to accept this encouraging

answer without reservation, however, for he made no response whatever.

"Who are you?" added Roger, a little rudely.

"Tell me first what you want here, and I will then tell you my name."

"I want to come in and rest, that is all."

"I'm not hindering you," growled the stranger.

"There's plenty of room for two."

"There must be room enough for three, then."

"For three? Then you are not alone?"

"No," replied Roger, curtly.

"That is very different. The hut is too small, and if you come in I shall be obliged to leave."

"Oh, a woman doesn't count, and I am sure we shall find room enough."

"Is that a woman there behind you?" inquired the stranger, who must have had sharp eyes to distinguish Regina in the darkness.

"Yes, it is my sister, and as she is very tired I've no time to spend waiting at doors," replied the lieutenant, impatiently.

"Come, come, don't get angry. As the third party is a woman I think we can manage it. Wait a minute till I strike a light."

The lieutenant was about to protest against such an imprudence, but it occurred to him that a confession of his fears would betray the secret of his flight, so he was silent.

The sharp crack of a match, and the faint blue gleam of sulphur in the darkness proved that the inmate of the hut was keeping his promise, and a few seconds afterward the flickering light of a candle illumined the interior of this humble retreat which Roger could take in at a single glance.

"Now your apartment is ready," remarked the stranger, "and that of madame as well."

Without taking any notice of this attempt at pleasantry

the lieutenant shouldered his pack, and with his pick still in his hand, stepped upon the threshold. The young girl followed him without evincing the slightest uneasiness; indeed, judging from her calmness, one might have supposed she had anticipated this meeting.

Roger, before stepping through the door-way, which was so low that he was obliged to bend his head, took a hasty survey of the hut and its occupant. Built of rough logs, surmounted with a thatched roof, and destitute of windows, this primitive abode must have formerly served as a temporary shelter for wood-cutters, for the only furniture consisted of three or four old chairs and the trunk of a tree that served as a table.

The occupant of the hut was a stout man, with a rather jovial face, and clad in gray blouse. There was nothing unfriendly in his manner or in his attitude, and no such thing as a surprise was possible in the narrow space inclosed by the four log walls of the cabin.

All this was so reassuring that Roger decided to enter, and taking his companion by the hand, he led her inside, and then carefully closed the door behind him.

"You must excuse us for frightening you, comrade," he remarked, as he entered, for he had decided to prevent any questions by a faithful impersonation of his rôle of peddler.

"Frightening me! Oh, no, indeed, I assure you. I—I have nothing to conceal or to—to fear," stammered the stranger.

The eagerness with which the speaker protested against the supposition, and his evident embarrassment, seemed very strange to the lieutenant.

"Of course not," he replied, with an air of profound conviction, "but in these times, you know, and at night, in the middle of a forest, one never knows with whom one has to deal."

"That is true," replied the stranger; "besides, when

one has one's goods with him one is naturally a little suspicious."

"Goods!" repeated Roger.

"Yes, and a big lot of them," replied the man, pointing to a pack that was standing in a corner of the hut. "I am a peddler, as you see."

"A peddler!" exclaimed the officer before he had time to repress this expression of his surprise.

"Yes, at your service, comrade."

It would be difficult to imagine a more unfortunate coincidence for Roger, who was so little acquainted with the rôle he had assumed, for the prospect of being obliged to talk with a *confrère* about fairs and the price of merchandise was annoying in the extreme.

"And you are in the same business, I see," he added.

"It seems strange. I suppose you are on your way from—"

"Saint Germain," replied the lieutenant, "and I am going—"

"To Poissy, perhaps?" hastily interposed the stranger.

"Yes."

"Then we shall not be able to travel along together, I am sorry to say, for I am on my way to Achères," remarked the other peddler, in a tone that belied his words.

"How singular!" thought Roger. "He seems to be as anxious to get rid of me as I am to get rid of him."

Then he added, aloud:

"As soon as my sister has rested an hour or two we shall have to trudge on again, for we have a long way to go."

"Yes, the girl must indeed be tired," remarked the stranger, examining Regina more attentively.

"She is a brave girl, though, and no chatter-box. She is deaf and dumb," remarked Roger.

"Is it possible! Poor child!" exclaimed the stranger, who seemed to be sincere this time.

"Yes, but that doesn't prevent her from being a good

saleswoman. In fact, she can beat me," added Roger, who was beginning to enter into the spirit of his rôle.

"Well, comrade, I haven't much to offer you," responded the other, "but if you will take a bite and drink a glass of wine with me, I have enough to keep all three of us from starving in my pack."

Roger hesitated, but he fancied he read a look advising him to accept in Regina's eyes, so he accepted.

"We can talk while we eat," continued the stranger, "and I sha'n't be sorry, for I've been by myself three days, and I've nearly lost the use of my tongue."

Then, as if he feared he had said too much, he knelt down to open his pack, and Roger fancied that a slight flush suffused his face.

In a peddler who was in the habit of running about to fairs this was certainly very strange.

"I really must find out about this man," thought the officer.

CHAPTER XIII.

So many strange events had followed one another in quick succession since his escape from the hospital at Saint Germain that Roger had scarcely had time to think.

The expedition to the giant oak, the arrival of the Prussians, the conflagration in the forest, and their subsequent flight, all these exciting events had passed without comment.

He had not even had the consolation of talking over these matters with a friend, for the sole companion of his dangers could neither speak nor hear.

On reaching the hut Roger had hoped to be able to consult with Regina by the only means at her command, that is to say, with the slate or the alphabet she always carried around with her.

He had so many things to say to her, so many questions

to ask about those who were dear to him, that he longed unspeakably for a few moments' conversation with her, and his annoyance on unexpectedly encountering a brother peddler was correspondingly great, to say nothing of the fact that there was a certain air of mystery about the stranger's person and manner that was well calculated to make the lieutenant uneasy.

Perhaps Regina shared his distrust, but if she did she gave no sign, for her companion, who was used to reading the expression of her eyes, saw there only a lively curiosity.

While these thoughts were passing through Roger's mind the stranger was completing his preparations for the impromptu supper.

He had produced a loaf of bread, a cold fowl, some cheese and apples, and had spread them out upon a large red handkerchief which he had taken from his pack to serve as a table-cloth, and concluded his preparations by detaching from his belt a leather-covered flask, which he set down in front of him with great care and respect.

"You see there is no danger of our starving this evening, comrades," he remarked, gayly.

"I should say not," replied Roger, "I'm not as well off as you are, for I was in such a hurry that I forgot to lay in a fresh stock of provisions at Saint Germain."

"That doesn't matter. When there's enough for one there's enough for three," interrupted the stranger.

"But I'm afraid we shall be robbing you," remarked Roger. "You have a long distance to go, perhaps, and—"

"Oh, no, my journey will end to-night," replied the stranger. "To-morrow I shall have no further use for my store of eatables."

"Your journey will end to-night, did you say?" asked the lieutenant, looking his host full in the face.

"No, no, I didn't mean that exactly, but you know down at Maisons one can get whatever one needs."

"Why, I thought you were going to Achères?"

This time Roger distinctly saw the blood mount the cheek of the peddler, who went energetically to work to carve the chicken instead of replying.

This was no time to insist, but it was impossible to doubt the existence of a mystery any longer, and while he intended to solve it if possible, the young man mentally resolved to be more prudent.

Regina, who was usually very indifferent to the pleasures of the table, seemed to enjoy her supper very much that evening, nor was the fact to be wondered at, inasmuch as the food must have been very acceptable after her long walk; and the calmness and tranquillity she displayed partially reassured the lieutenant, who had great confidence in his companion's sagacity. Nevertheless, while he did ample justice to the repast, he did not neglect to watch his host furtively but closely.

There was very little to be learned from his face, which was that of a rather commonplace middle-aged person. He was of medium height, stout rather than thin, and the possessor of features that were as regular as they were insignificant.

The prevailing expression of his countenance was that of gayety—a gayety tempered by a certain reserve whose cause was not yet clearly apparent. There was a perpetual smile upon his rather thick lips, and a restlessness in his small gray eyes, but not the slightest sign of cunning.

The *tout ensemble* was entirely destitute of distinction, and yet his skin was not sunburned like that of a man whose business compels him to spend most of his time in the open air, and his hands, though broad and thick, were evidently not used to work.

“After all, he, like myself, may have good reasons for concealing himself,” thought Roger, “but with no evil intentions.”

As the repast went on, the host regaled himself frequently from the flask, and in proportion as its contents disap-

peared from view, he seemed more and more inclined to talk, so Roger resolved not to neglect this opportunity to question him.

"Well, comrade," he began, without appearing to attach much importance to the question, "how are our friends down there in the Army of the Loire getting on?"

The stranger frowned slightly, but replied with a careless shrug of the shoulders:

"I don't know, upon my word! I have just been making a trip through Normandy, and, provided goods sell well, I don't trouble myself much about other matters."

"That is about the case with me; still, that doesn't prevent me from being a Frenchman, and it makes my blood boil to hear these Prussians boast. Would you believe it, in Saint Germain they are openly declaring in all the *cafés* that Paris can't hold out a week longer?"

"They certainly are a set of boasters," said the other peddler, philosophically.

"Still, I don't know but they're about right. Only yesterday I met a miller who seems to understand the condition of affairs pretty well, and he told me that the Parisians hadn't flour enough to last the year out."

"It is false!" exclaimed the stranger, hotly. "Paris has flour enough to last six weeks, and horse-flesh enough for four months."

"How do you know?"

"I—I have heard them say so—at the fairs. You know, at fairs—people talk a good deal, and of course I listen," stammered the other peddler, evidently much embarrassed.

"Oh, I had no intention of blaming you. Though I sell to the Prussians, and make a good deal of money out of them, I am a true Frenchman at heart, and when I meet good patriots like yourself it does me good. To your health, comrade!"

"And to yours!" responded the other peddler, accepting the flask from the hands of his new friend.

"And now, as you seem to be a pretty good sort of a man, you will give me a little information, perhaps?" remarked Roger.

"I will, of course, if I can."

"Do you know whether they require passports at Maisons?"

"Yes; just as they do everywhere else."

"I asked the question because I'm afraid that mine doesn't exactly meet the requirements, and I should like to know—"

"I couldn't tell you, however," interrupted the stranger.

"The requirements vary in different places—"

"But you have one, haven't you?"

"Certainly, and it is signed by two colonels and a major."

"Prussians?"

"Of course. It states my name, which is Pierre Bourdier, if you care to know; and then the rest, born in Rouen, and traveling from Evreux to Beauvais."

Just then, some one tapped gently on the door of the hut—so gently that the sound would have escaped any but an attentive and practiced ear.

Bourdier did not appear to have heard the sound, and for a moment Roger fancied he must have been mistaken, for it seemed highly improbable that any visitor would come to this lonely hut at this hour of the night; besides, how could he have approached without betraying his presence, for in the profound silence that pervaded this secluded portion of the forest, the slightest sound awakened an echo.

To guard against any surprise, the young lieutenant rose, and turning to his host, asked:

"Did you hear anything just now?"

"Nothing," replied the peddler, with an air of surprise that evidently was not assumed.

"I thought I heard some one."

"Where?"

"There, outside the door."

"Really?"

"Yes; I could have sworn that some one rapped."

"It was the wind, probably?"

The stranger's embarrassment as he made this reply instantly excited Roger's suspicions.

"What if he is in league with some one to betray us, and deliver us up to the Prussians?" he thought.

Just as this idea occurred to him, the rapping was repeated.

This time there could be no possible doubt.

A human being had just announced his presence, and was demanding an entrance.

The man who answered to the name of Pierre Bourdier was on his feet in an instant, and slipped his hand under his blouse, as if in search of a weapon. Roger seized his pick, and both, forgetting their mutual distrust, turned to the door.

"What if it should be a Prussian?" muttered the lieutenant.

"Then we shall have to kill him," hissed the peddler through his set teeth.

His good-natured face had suddenly assumed a resolute expression that struck Roger. Regina did not move, though her companion's attitude must have warned her of their danger. Possibly it had already occurred to her that the intruders would have entered less ceremoniously had they been Prussians.

"Are you ready, comrade?" asked the lieutenant.

"To exterminate two or three—yes."

"Then I will open the door, and you can count upon my assistance."

The visitor could hardly have failed to hear every word of this conversation, but it did not seem to frighten him, for he continued to rap with the same regularity and gentleness.

If the intruder was an enemy, he was certainly not an impatient or violent one, for at least five minutes had been spent in consultations and in preparations for defense; but perhaps this might be only a *ruse* to entice them out of the cabin, and Roger, who suspected this, governed himself accordingly.

The door opened on the outside. Roger motioned Regina and Bourdier to stand where the light of the candle would not fall full upon them, and then stationed himself where the door would screen him, but where the enemy would also be within his reach.

The intruder that presented himself to view was by no means formidable, however, for the door had scarcely opened when a fragile form appeared upon the threshold, and a plaintive voice uttered the words:

“Charity, my good gentlemen, if you please.”

Roger was so little prepared to hear this traditional formula, that he gave a start of surprise, and stepped forward to get a better look at this strange mendicant who went roaming about the forest at night in quest of alms.

“Come in,” he cried, brusquely, seizing the intruder roughly by the collar, and the movement was executed with such promptness and precision that the door was closed and the beggar hurled into the middle of the hut before he had time to reply.

The insignificant appearance of the new-comer did not seem to justify the precautions taken against him. He was a lad not more than thirteen or fourteen years of age, in whose pinched face and puny form there was nothing in the least formidable. He was clad in dirty rags that only partially covered his body. His feet, reddened by the cold, were destitute of shoes, which explained how he had been able to reach the door of the hut without making any noise, while his head-gear consisted only of a rough thatch of red hair that hung down upon his low forehead and half concealed his eyes.

The hardest heart could scarcely remain untouched in the presence of such misery, and Roger could but experience a feeling of remorse at the thought that he had prolonged the child's suffering by keeping him waiting outside in the cold. He was ashamed, too, of having taken so many precautions, and hastily laid down his weapon.

The child did not appear at all alarmed, however, but seemed to be examining Regina with close attention, though, dressed as she was, there was nothing in her appearance that would be likely to excite astonishment.

"What do you want, boy?" asked the peddler, who was watching the lad with some distrust.

"Charity, my good gentlemen," repeated the *gamin*, in the same monotonous tone.

"We are not millionaires," replied Bourdier, "but if you want something to eat we will give it to you all the same."

The lad made no reply.

"Are you hungry?" asked Roger.

"Yes, my good sir."

"And thirsty?"

"Yes, my good sir."

This refrain seemed to have been learned by heart, for he repeated it in the same sing-song tone in which he would have repeated a lesson.

"Then sit down and help yourself to what is left," said the peddler, pointing to a chair, and pushing the bread and cheese and the nearly empty flask in front of his new guest. The beggar obeyed without a word, and, drawing a knife from his pocket, began his supper.

Roger and the peddler reseated themselves and began to watch their guest eat. They soon exchanged significant glances. The same thought had occurred to each of them. This mendicant, though he pretended to be nearly famished, eat with singular deliberation. He seemed to have great difficulty in swallowing even the tiny fragments of bread that he cut, and he scarcely touched the cheese.

"Where did you come from?" inquired Pierre Bourdier. The child slowly disposed of a mouthful before replying. One might have supposed that he was weighing his words.

"I got lost in the forest, my good gentlemen," he said at last.

"What were you doing in the forest?"

There was another silence, then the *gamin*, beginning with his invariable formula, said:

"My good sir, I was returning from Carrières where I went to drive some cows for my uncle."

"You belong in this neighborhood, then?"

"To be sure I do."

"Then you can guide us to Maisons or Achères, I suppose?"

"Yes, indeed," replied the lad, promptly, forgetting his refrain this time. "I know all the roads, and I could take you there with my eyes shut."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the peddler. "Then how did you happen to get lost?"

The lad, caught in the trap set for him by Bourdier, responded stupidly:

"I don't know."

"He must be an idiot," muttered Roger.

The peddler gave a wink that said plainly:

"Not so much of an idiot as you think."

Then he added, aloud:

"If you will tell us the way to Maisons I will give you a twenty-sous piece."

"I'll do it, but I shall have to go with you," replied the lad, promptly.

"Very well; we'll start as soon as you've finished your supper."

"Oh, I can eat as I go along," said the *gamin*, springing to his feet.

"It is strange that he's so anxious to go with us," thought Roger, but at the same instant he felt the peddler.

slip into his hand something that he had just picked up off the floor, and that must have fallen from the child's pocket.

Rising, he turned to examine what Bourdier had so mysteriously handed him, and found it was a Prussian thaler.

This discovery had a significance which it was impossible to misunderstand, for it could have been given him only by Prussians, and as the people of that nation are proverbially stingy, he must have rendered them an important service to be thus rewarded.

These very logical deductions instantly flashed through the mind of Roger, and it was enough for him to glance at the peddler to see that the same idea had occurred to him.

"In a minute, lad. We are not in such a hurry as all that," said Pierre Bourdier, who probably wanted to have time to reflect before coming to a decision.

The situation had certainly become much more complicated. Nothing could be easier than for two vigorous men to rid themselves of this puny boy, but this would not avert the real danger. What was there to prove that the Prussians were not concealed somewhere in the immediate vicinity of the hut, ready to rush in at the first signal or at the lad's first cry for help?

Still the lad's unmistakable eagerness to see them on their way seemed to indicate other plans on his part. The intention to betray was evident. Everything indicated the young rascal's resolve to conduct his hosts straight into the Prussian lines, and he unquestionably offered himself as a guide with this perfidious intention.

To decline his services would be easy, it is true, but how were they to prevent him from following them at a distance in order to denounce them at the first Prussian outpost they came to on the road.

The action of the peddler in picking up the thaler had dispelled all Roger's suspicions in regard to him, and the certainty of having found an ally consoled the young officer a little; but he was anxious to devise some way of consult-

ing with him without being heard by the lad and without exciting his suspicions.

The young rascal had resumed his seat, and was now engaged in paring an apple, probably for the sake of having some occupation, and his face, which had become so animated a moment before when the question of departure was mooted, had regained its usual stupid expression.

Bourdier sat with his elbows on his knees and his chin resting in his hands. He was evidently endeavoring to find some way out of the dilemma; and Roger was looking inquiringly at Regina, to whom he instinctively turned for aid in all trying situations.

The silence was profound, and the lad occasionally stole a furtive glance at his hosts, as if wondering why they did not speak.

The lieutenant's astonishment was intense when he saw Regina pick up her satchel, open it, and take from it several pieces of small coin and a pack of cards.

For an instant he thought she must have gone mad, but her manner was perfectly calm, and her face, which had been so grave a moment before, had become smiling.

She laid the cards down in front of her, and pushed forward a piece of money.

The lad watched her wonderingly, but did not move. Roger alone noticed the sudden gleam in his eyes as the girl displayed her slender hoard.

At last she touched the lad gently on the arm, and nodded her head inquiringly.

"Do you want to play?" he asked.

Regina gave a nod of acquiescence.

"All right! I know how to play *bataille*," cried the boy, seizing the cards.

"A good idea, that!" muttered the peddler, with a side glance at the lieutenant.

"Go ahead, little one, and win ten sous before we start," said Roger.

"All right, my good gentlemen; that suits me," responded the urchin, resuming his drawl.

"And if you lose, what will you pay with?" asked Bourdier.

"I sha'n't lose," answered the young rascal, promptly.

On hearing this announcement, which so plainly indicated the lad's intention of cheating, if necessary, the officer could hardly repress a smile; but his comrade, who did not lose sight of more important matters, rose and said:

"I think we shall have time to smoke a pipe outside. The smell of tobacco-smoke is disagreeable to my sister; so she can amuse herself here with the boy, while we have a little smoke."

"Very well," replied Roger, understanding the motive that prompted the suggestion.

"Well, boy, good luck to you!" remarked Bourdier, as he opened the door. "Hold yourself in readiness to start as soon as I have finished my pipe."

As soon as they had crossed the threshold, and carefully closed the door behind them, the two men exchanged a silent pressure of the hand, and Bourdier whispered, hurriedly:

"Over there, behind the rock!"

A moment afterward, they found themselves face to face at the spot indicated. Bourdier was the first to speak.

"Sir," he said, with a sudden change of tone and language, "you distrusted me a few moments ago, as I at first distrusted you, but I think you are now satisfied in regard to me."

"Certainly," said Roger, though his doubts were not entirely dispelled.

"Oh, well," resumed the man in the gray blouse, "I see that I shall have to confess first, for we have no time to lose. In the first place, I am no more a peddler than you are."

"Ah!" said the officer, coldly.

"Listen, sir," continued the pretended peddler, no whit disconcerted; "I am not much of a talker, but I think I am something of a physiognomist, and I saw through your disguise at least an hour ago."

Roger recoiled a step or two.

"Oh, I don't ask you for your secret, but I certainly have a right to tell you mine. I am the bearer of important dispatches from the general in command of the Army of the Loire, and I am trying to make my way to Paris through the Prussian lines. If I am captured, I shall be shot without mercy. You have only to say a word, or make a sign to that young scoundrel in there, and I'm a dead man. Do you still distrust me?"

These last words were uttered with so much simplicity and frankness that all Roger's doubts vanished.

"You are a brave man," he said, in a voice that trembled with emotion, at the same time extending a hand that the other grasped cordially.

"Yes; I think so," replied the pretended peddler, laughing.

"And I will have no further secrets from you," added the young lieutenant. "I am an officer in the French army; I was wounded and taken prisoner two months ago; I escaped only last evening from the hospital at Saint Germain, and if I fall into the hands of the Prussians my life will be worth no more than yours."

"I sincerely hope that neither of us will be captured," exclaimed Pierre Bourdier. "As for the lady—"

"It is to her and to her devotion that I am indebted for my liberty, and—"

"You can tell me all about that by and by. Time is precious now, for we must devise some way of getting out of the scrape into which this young rascal has led us."

"Yes; and if you can find a way of escape, you are cleverer than I am."

"Well, I have."

"Let me hear it."

"It is very simple, but it may not suit you."

"What is it?"

"First of all, I must know what you intend to do. You say that you have been a prisoner at Saint Germain, and that you succeeded in making your escape, thanks to the assistance of the young lady. This fact does not surprise me, for she seems to me exceedingly clever; but I have no idea where you wish to go."

"I want to get as far as possible from the Prussians," replied the officer, evasively.

"Of course, but that is easier said than done, for the rascals are everywhere, and you will have to pass through their lines whichever way you go."

"Then what difference does it make which road I take?" said Roger, with the indifference of a man who is resigned to any misfortune.

"On the contrary, it does make a vast amount of difference, and I will tell you why. I am on my way to Paris, as I confessed just now, and I am resolved to reach there or perish by the way. When I left that city, a fortnight ago, I had no idea of the danger to which I was exposing myself, but now that I have had the good fortune to fulfill half of my mission, I certainly am not going to abandon the idea of completing it. You, on the contrary, have the power to choose."

"Choose between what?"

"Why, between joining one of our armies in the provinces, or re-entering the corps in which you were serving at the time of your capture, for I will not insult you by supposing that you think of returning to your home while the very existence of France is in jeopardy."

"You are right, and you are a noble man," replied Roger.

"You must decide, and at once, whether you will make a desperate effort to reach the old fortifications of Paris,

which are still holding out, and which will continue to hold out a long time, I hope," continued Bourdier, "or make your way cautiously through Normandy or down the Maine, and as all roads lead to Rome, join the Army of the North or the Army of the Loire."

"That is true," muttered the young officer, struck by the clearness with which his new friend presented the two alternatives.

"It is merely a matter of taste," remarked Pierre, gayly. "One can be of as much service to his country in one place as in the other. There is plenty of danger and glory for every one now."

"And I want my share of it," said Roger, straightening himself up, proudly.

"Ah, well, then, choose, comrade, choose."

"I—I don't know—I can not decide yet," stammered the lieutenant who had had no chance to confer with Regina, and who was unwilling to decide without consulting her.

"I will assist you if you wish," replied Bourdier. "It will be much easier for you to reach the provinces than to reach Paris. You know, of course, that the Prussians can not spread themselves out over the entire country, and our militia harass them so much that they have no time to run after any solitary individuals who may be traveling through the land. If you decide for the Army of the Loire I will give you a little itinerary which will take you there as easily as if you were going from Paris to Saint Cloud. Every evening, or rather every morning, for it will be better for you to travel during the night and rest in the day-time, you will reach the house of a worthy peasant of my acquaintance who will receive you with open arms when you give him the pass-word I will disclose to you."

"And Regina would be exposed to very little danger, you think?"

"Much less than in this confounded forest, I assure you."

"This would be the most prudent course, I suppose," remarked the officer.

"There is not the slightest doubt of it. Now let us consider the other. To reach Paris would be a much more difficult matter. Two lines of Prussian posts are to be passed, the Seine is to be crossed three times, and to cap the climax, there is a very good chance of receiving a bullet from our sharpshooters, who have a very inconvenient habit of firing right and left, especially at night."

"Still, if I were alone, I think I should make the venture," muttered the lieutenant; "but with Regina—"

"But," continued Pierre Bourdier, without showing any signs of having heard this remark, "but after all this comes Paris, and the friends, the relatives, the sisters, and—the betrothed one has left there."

His voice trembled with emotion, and his eyes sparkled.

"I am speaking only for myself, of course," he added, gently.

"But I too have friends and companions in arms, and a—a relative—in Paris!" exclaimed Roger.

"Besides," continued the pretended peddler, "there is France—"

"France?"

"Yes, for so long as Paris holds out our country still lives, and if Paris succumbs— Ah, well, I shall at least have the consolation of falling with the city in which I first saw the light."

Roger could restrain himself no longer, and seizing the hand of his heroic companion, he exclaimed, enthusiastically:

"We will start together whenever you say the word."

"I was sure you would accompany me," said Bourdier, whose excitement had suddenly given place to an air of cold resolve. "I have known for an hour that I could depend upon you, as you can depend upon me."

"We will reach Paris or we will all three perish in the attempt," said Roger, firmly.

"Listen to me," said the brave messenger. "This is the fourth time I have made this venture, and I know the country as well as you know your company. I tell you this so you can feel safe in leaving the selection of our route to me."

"I fear only one thing, and that is that I shall hamper your movements, and be a hinderance to you."

"Quite the contrary, lieutenant," said Pierre, gayly. "In union there is strength. That is the motto engraved upon the hundred-sous pieces, and you will find that the device is a good one. But the first thing to be done is to get rid of that young scoundrel in there, who will betray us before daylight if I don't take measures to prevent it. I have had abundant opportunities to become acquainted with that race of vipers, and I know a way to circumvent them."

"Tell me quickly then, for we have been talking here a long time, and I'm afraid he suspects our plans."

"There's no danger of that. He is too busily engaged in cheating your sister."

Just then a sound like that of scuffling reached them from the hut.

"Listen!" said Roger.

"One would suppose there was a fight going on in there."

"But that is impossible, for there is no one there but Regina and the boy."

"But the young imp is quite capable of killing her, to secure possession of her money," muttered Pierre Bourdier.

"Let us make haste, then!" cried the officer, horrified by this idea which had not occurred to him before. "Upon my word, I believe you are right. We will resume our conversation presently after we see what is going on."

And the worthy peddler darted off, closely followed by Roger.

Just as they were rounding the corner of the big mass of granite that overhung the ravine, the door of the hut suddenly opened, and a human form appeared upon the threshold.

"The young scoundrel!" exclaimed Bourdier.

He bounded toward the hut, but just as he was about to seize the beggar by the collar—for it was he who had just appeared in the door-way—the young rascal stooped so suddenly and adroitly that the hand of the peddler encountered only empty air, and before he had time to repeat the attempt the boy was beyond his reach.

Never did a serpent slip more suddenly through the hands of the person ready to crush it.

Bourdier turned hastily, but he was too late; the little monster had already disappeared around the corner of the hut.

"I'll catch him, never fear!" said the messenger from the Army of the Loire, starting off in hot pursuit, and the night being dark, a few seconds afterward both of them were out of sight.

All this had occurred in much less time than it takes to tell it, and Roger stood petrified with astonishment and terror.

At last the thought of Regina recurred to his mind, and he rushed wildly into the hut.

The door was open, but profound darkness enshrouded the interior of the cabin, for the light had been extinguished in the struggle.

"Regina, where are you?" cried Roger, forgetting in his terror that the poor child could not hear him.

There was, of course, no response, and with hands outstretched Roger made his way cautiously across the cabin, fearing all the while that he might step on the prostrate body of the young girl. His heart throbbed almost to bursting, and he trembled so that more than once he was obliged to lean against the wall to keep from falling.

Finding nothing the young officer finally stooped to search for the extinguished lantern, and as he did so a hand was laid softly on his arm.

"You are living!" he exclaimed. "Thank God!"

Almost at the same instant the fingers of his other hand came in contact with the box of matches Pierre Bourdier had used.

To find the overturned lantern was only the work of a moment now, and as soon as it was lighted he uttered a cry of joy.

The young girl was sitting in the same chair in which he had left her, and though she was very pale she seemed to be neither hurt nor much frightened. Her clothing was disordered, but that was the only trace of the struggle left upon her person.

Reassured in regard to his companion's fate, the lieutenant felt the necessity of an immediate decision concerning his future course, for time was precious. Bourdier had started off in pursuit of the beggar lad, but whether he succeeded in capturing him or not he would soon return.

Yet no sound came from the forest.

"What is to be done?" murmured the officer, gloomily.

To wait for Pierre Bourdier's return was to run a great risk of capture, for the night was far spent, and the Prussians might appear with the dawn.

To make his way through the forest in the direction of Normandy was still possible, but since his new friend had spoken of the chance of reaching Paris a wild desire to re-join Renée had taken possession of Roger's heart. In fact, he had decided to make the attempt and risk his life to see the woman he loved again.

But he had very little chance of success without Bourdier's assistance, and the thought of exposing Regina to almost certain death made him shudder; but on the other hand the idea of thus deserting the companion Providence had sent him was most distasteful to him.

Regina, as usual, came to his assistance. She had regained her wonted composure, and seeing her so calm and composed, one could hardly believe that she had just been the victim of such gross violence.

Roger saw her open the satchel she wore suspended from her belt, and take from it a slate on which she hastily wrote these words:

“We must leave immediately.”

“Ah! poor child, she does not know where I want to go!” he exclaimed, sorrowfully.

But after glancing up at him with eyes that sparkled with intelligence and heroic resolve, she rubbed out the words, and to Roger’s profound astonishment, hastily penciled these lines:

“They are waiting for us in Paris, and we can reach there to-morrow.”

“Paris!” exclaimed the lieutenant. “One would almost think that she could read my thoughts.”

Paris! that magical word made him forget everything else.

Bourdier’s absence, the terrible dangers of the journey that lay before them, were for a time forgotten, but as he stooped to shoulder his pack his eyes fell upon that of the other peddler, which its owner had left standing in a corner of the hut.

The sight of it instantly aroused the lieutenant’s remorse, and he asked himself—and this time very seriously—if he had any right to thus abandon the generous companion who was even now endeavoring to rid them of a dangerous enemy.

While he was thus reflecting Regina stepped up to him, took his arm, and leading him gently to the door of the hut, pointed to that part of the sky where the stars that form the Great Bear were shining.

Roger had never devoted much attention to astronomy, but he understood the girl’s motive, for the position of the

constellation indicated that the night was far spent, and Regina's gesture said plainly:

"It is time to start."

"Ah! she does not know all," Roger said to himself. "She did not hear what that brave man said to me. It is even possible that she still distrusts him. How can I make her understand the debt of gratitude we owe him, and how much assistance he could still render us?"

Without waiting for any sign of assent, however, Regina picked up the lantern, opened it, took out the candle, extinguished it, and threw it far out among the bushes.

It would have been impossible to say more emphatically:

"I understand what you would like to do; nevertheless, we must depart, and at once."

Roger felt himself vanquished, and yielded to the strong will that had gained the mastery over him more than once. The feeling that urged him to wait for Bourlier's return gave place to a sort of superstitious confidence in Regina, for it seemed to him that the kind Providence that had been watching over him ever since his escape manifested itself in the unerring instinct of this strange young girl.

He turned, however, for one last glance at the wretched hut, and pictured to himself the poor peddler returning, disappointed and fatigued, only to find the place deserted.

"After all, my departure will not prevent him from continuing his journey," he muttered. "Perhaps he will even get through the Prussian lines more easily without us."

Just as this thought came to ease his troubled conscience he fancied he heard a sound in the distance, and after listening a moment he became satisfied that it came from the very direction in which Pierre Bourdier had gone.

It was much louder and more regular than the footsteps of any one person traveling through the forest, and as it was approaching the cottage Roger soon distinguished the measured tread of horses' hoofs upon the frozen ground.

The pretended peddler certainly could not be one of this cavalcade, which seemed to be quite numerous.

A squad of cavalry was certainly approaching the cabin.

"The die is cast!" muttered Roger, following Regina, who had been trying to drag him out of the hut for several seconds.

It was certainly time to flee, for the riders had just broken into a trot, and it was not unlikely that they suspected the presence of the fugitives.

The young girl could not be conscious of their danger, as it was impossible for her to hear the sound, but her instinct continued to serve her wonderfully well, for she unhesitatingly selected the best direction to avoid the enemy.

After rounding the corner of the huge mass of granite at whose base the two pretended peddlers had held their conference, she turned into a path whose existence the young officer had not even suspected. It was not even wide enough for two persons to walk abreast, so it would be utterly impracticable for horsemen; but it was absolutely free of all the obstacles that are usually found in forest paths. There were no dead branches to crush, no briars or overhanging vines to put aside, no pebbles to roll about under one's feet. One could walk there as easily and noiselessly as along a garden path.

Was it chance, or was it a thorough knowledge of the forest that had made Regina choose this route? This was a question that Roger was unable to answer.

After a quarter of an hour of rapid walking the fugitives had good reason to believe themselves out of danger. At all events, they could no longer hear the sound of horses' hoofs either because they were now far in advance of the squad or because the squad had changed its course. Still, the young girl walked on without once hesitating or turning back, though numerous paths presented themselves. It was evident now that Regina was on familiar ground, and that she was directing her course toward a certain point.

By observing the polar star the lieutenant discovered that they were traveling in a north-easterly direction, and he was sufficiently acquainted with the country to know that they would eventually reach the neighborhood of Maisons Laffitte • if they continued to follow their present course.

“What will become of us,” he thought, “when we reach the open country, where each village is occupied, and the enemy’s surveillance is incessant?”

But as it was too late to draw back, and as he had faith in his leader besides, Roger followed her without a protest.

They had walked at least two hours when Regina suddenly paused, and, depositing her burden at the base of an old beech-tree, motioned her companion to do the same.

The lieutenant, rather surprised at this abrupt halt, looked around him, and started violently on hearing a screech-owl send forth a lugubrious shriek from the branches above his head. In such a situation as this the strongest mind becomes a prey to senseless terror, and though Roger was not superstitious the bird’s mournful cry made an unpleasant impression for which he would have blushed at any other time.

Regina had already placed her satchel against the trunk of the tree, and after pressing her companion’s hand as if to bid him a brief farewell, she stretched herself out upon the frozen ground, laid her head on her improvised pillow, and closed her eyes.

A few seconds afterward her slow and regular breathing showed that she had fallen into a deep sleep.

This determination to rest had been carried into execution so promptly that the young officer felt considerable surprise and uneasiness, especially as morning must be near at hand, and with it would come even graver perils than those through which they had passed, and this halt might cost them dear.

It did not surprise Roger that his companion had at last succumbed to fatigue and a very natural desire to sleep;

for after six or seven hours of such strenuous exertion and terrible anxiety, sleep not unfrequently becomes such an imperative necessity that it triumphs over the strongest will. And yet the young girl had arranged her rude couch so tranquilly that she seemed to be executing a previously made plan. When one is the victim of physical and mental exhaustion one does not stretch one's self out on the ground, one sinks down upon it; but Regina had stretched herself out with the methodical coolness of a soldier who says to himself, "I shall still have an hour before the battle; I must sleep," and who sleeps. That rare power which contributes so much to the making of heroes—the power to sleep at will—was evidently hers.

Depositing his pack on the ground he opened it, and took from it a piece of heavy cloth that he spread over the girl for a covering.

The cold had perceptibly increased with the approach of morning, and a raw chilly wind was rising.

A sort of lethargy stole over the lieutenant, and he was obliged to summon up all his energy to prevent himself from yielding to the intense desire to sleep that had taken possession of him.

To watch over the sleeping Regina was an imperative duty, however; besides, sleep in such a temperature as this was perhaps death.

So he began to walk to and fro to warm himself, and the ring of his boot-heels on the frozen ground was probably not to the taste of the bird perched upon the branches above his head, for she again uttered her plaintive cry, and it must either have created an echo in the forest, or there must have been another bird of the same species within hearing, for the cry was repeated in the distance.

His experience in the army had made the officer suspicious, and these cries aroused his distrust for an instant. It even occurred to him that during the first revolution Breton peasants made signals to one another in the forest

by imitating the lugubrious shriek of the screech-owl. He soon dismissed this fancy, however, as being too absurd for credence in the present instance, especially as on looking up into the tree he could see absolutely nothing on the leafless branches, but he perceived that the trunk of the tree was covered to a considerable height with withered wreaths and faded bouquets that pious passers-by had hung beneath a small statue of the Virgin.

Regina had displayed a thorough knowledge of the forest that night, and if she stopped here to sleep under this tree, so easily distinguishable from the others, she must have had good reasons for so doing.

Roger was endeavoring to guess them, when he again heard the dismal shriek of the bird of night. This time it proceeded from a dense thicket on the same side of the tree as at first, but from not nearly as far off. There was no response to the call, however, from the top of the beech, so the lieutenant concluded that the bird had flown, and he was not sorry to be spared a lugubrious sound that interrupted his reflections and irritated his nerves.

To Roger's great relief there was no sign of dawn in the east, but though they had left Saint Germain long before midnight the fugitives had been the victims of so many vicissitudes that they had lost a great deal of time, and daylight would probably overtake them by the time they reached the edge of the forest.

"If I only had that brave messenger with me," muttered the lieutenant, "I could ask him about this place and the route we ought to take, and I am sure that he would be of great assistance to me. But who knows what has become of him?" he added, thinking the beggar lad must have led him into some trap.

This soliloquy was interrupted by another shriek from the owl in the neighboring thicket.

The bird was evidently coming nearer, but the owl in the beech-tree, if it had not flown, persisted in its silence.

The cry was repeated after a moment's interval, and this time the young officer fancied he recognized in this successful imitation certain notes that belong exclusively to the human voice.

The matter was becoming serious, and Roger deemed it prudent to pause in his promenade. He even thought for a moment of waking Regina, but he reflected that she would not be of any great service to him in case of an attack, and that it would be better not to wake her if it should prove a false alarm. So he placed himself with his back to the tree in such a way as to prevent any possibility of an attack in the rear, and to face the danger if danger there was.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE beech at whose base the young girl was sleeping stood alone in the midst of a thicket which extended on the side toward which Roger was looking to within about fifteen yards of it, so if any enemy approached from that direction he could remain concealed until the last moment.

While the officer was reflecting upon this strategic disadvantage the cry was repeated again, and this time at such a short distance that he could not help starting violently.

In his secret heart, however, he still believed that the sound had no special significance. If the signal had been answered, as at first, from the top of the tree, the meaning of these calls would have been apparent, but silence still reigned above Roger's head.

"I must be mistaken," he muttered. "It is only some frightened owl returning to her nest. Besides, it is getting late, and I must rouse Regina."

He was about to step away from the trunk of the tree when a quick rustling above his head made him glance upward, and almost at the same instant two feet were placed upon his shoulders.

Though Roger was a brave man his blood curdled in his veins, and he instinctively sprung back to escape the contact, at the same time turning to see the foe with whom he had to contend.

But rapid as was the movement he was not as quick as his unseen adversary, who sprung to the ground with wonderful celerity and seized Roger by the throat before he could assume a defensive attitude.

The shock was so sudden and so violent that they both fell to the ground. Roger, unfortunately, was the under one, and the next instant a knee was placed upon his breast, and two stalwart hands closed around his throat.

In vain he attempted to beat off his adversary with his clinched fists. He was so unprepared for this sudden attack that he had not even taken the precaution to seize his pick, so the result of this unequal struggle was not doubtful.

The assailant's intentions were evident. He was simply trying to strangle the officer, and his attempt was proving eminently successful.

Saint Senier felt that his breath was failing him. Already there was a strange buzzing in his ears, his sight was becoming dim, and his brain confused. Then his eyes closed. A few seconds more and death would inevitably ensue.

Just as he was about losing consciousness entirely he had a vague perception of a shock, and of the sound of a voice. The pressure upon his throat suddenly relaxed, and the air rushing into his lungs restored the life that was about deserting him.

There was a moment of intense agony, then he heaved a deep sigh, and opening his eyes and glancing around him he saw two men, one who was kneeling and trying to lift him, and another who was standing over him.

The new-comer was evidently an ally sent by Heaven to prevent the man who had descended from the tree from completing his work. The darkness prevented him from

distinguishing the features of his preserver, but a voice that he fancied he recognized fell upon his ear.

"It was quite time I came, evidently," remarked the new-comer, in a very cheerful tone.

"Yes; if you set much store on this man's life. A second more, and I think he would have been a *goner*."

"Well, my friend, how do you feel now?" inquired the other, addressing Roger.

"It is the peddler!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "Well, you'll assist me in dispatching this scoundrel, will you not?"

"Who? Father Sarrazin here?" asked Pierre Bourdier, laughing.

"Yes; this villain who tried to kill me," continued Roger, shaking his clinched fist at the former occupant of the tree.

"It was all a mistake, comrade, all a mistake," said the messenger from the Army of the Loire. "Father Sarrazin here is a friend, and a trusty one. He treated you rather roughly, but it was with the very best of intentions, I assure you."

"I utterly fail to understand," retorted Roger, dryly.

"It must seem very odd to you, but I am going to explain."

"Be quick about it, then," interrupted the person styled Father Sarrazin, "for I don't like the idea of remaining here."

"Don't be alarmed. It won't take me long. You must understand, of course," he continued, turning to Roger, "that I don't travel about the country with dispatches without taking my precautions. I have friends everywhere, and stopping-places all along the route. When you met me over there in the hut I knew that this brave friend was waiting for me here, and had it not been for that young imp who upset all my plans I should have conducted you here myself."

"So you had an appointment to meet him under this

tree?" asked Roger, who was beginning to understand the situation.

"Precisely, and it was a lucky chance that brought you here, for I feared you were lost; and, though I don't say it boastingly, I feel sure you would find it difficult to get out of the scrape alone."

The lieutenant could not help blushing at the thought that he had basely deserted this unknown friend, whose timely arrival had been the means of saving his life.

"And how is the young lady?" inquired Pierre Bourdier, gayly.

"She is lying there asleep. I was about to wake her, so we could resume our journey, when I was attacked by—by this man," remarked Roger, who still seemed to harbor considerable resentment against his late assailant.

"Then all will be well!" exclaimed the messenger, rubbing his hands complacently. "We had better rouse the young lady at once, and then get away from here as soon as possible, for it will be day-break in an hour."

"But why did this man attack me without even knowing whether or not I was an enemy?"

"Oh, I shouldn't have molested you, if I hadn't heard friend Bourdier coming," said Father Sarrazin.

"Yes," added the pretended peddler, "this brave man, who was on guard in the tree, saw you on the ground below. So long as he was alone, he did not move, but when I gave the signal to announce my speedy arrival it occurred to him that you had perhaps come here to catch me, and that I was about to fall into a trap you had set for me."

"So that screech-owl—"

"Was your humble servant, lieutenant," replied Pierre Bourdier. "Confess that I didn't play my part badly."

"You deceived me completely."

"You are not the only one, for I have played the same trick on the Prussians more than once. It's an accomplishment my father taught me."

"But there was another owl up there in the branches, and—"

"Oh, that owl was my friend Sarrazin. He wanted to warn me that he was at his post, but he stopped his song to give me to understand that I must be on my guard. If you hadn't been here he would have screeched three times instead of once. Not badly planned, eh?" added Bourdier, who certainly had cause to feel somewhat elated.

"It is wonderful," replied Roger, "and with your valuable assistance I really begin to think that we shall succeed in reaching Paris."

"Now we have reached the home of my old friend here you need feel no uneasiness. You will have an opportunity to make his acquaintance to-day, and you will see that he can do something more than play owl. He is equal to three of me in outwitting the Prussians. This is no time for compliments, however, but rather for the command: 'Forward, march!'"

"Not a Prussian within half a league of us, and fifty minutes of darkness at our disposal," said the new guide in the tone of a sergeant making his report.

"But how about the beggar boy who was going to betray us to the enemy?" inquired Roger, remembering the scare the squad of cavalry had caused him.

"He won't trouble us any more," replied the pretended peddler, laconically.

"What! You—"

"I'll tell you all about it when we reach a place of safety. Now you had better wake the young lady so we can be off."

The suggestion was unnecessary, for Regina was already on her feet preparing to resume her journey as composedly as if she had heard the whole conversation. Indeed, there were times when one was almost tempted to believe that her infirmity was only feigned.

"But see, the child is ready!" exclaimed Pierre Bourdier. "We shall not have the trouble of waking her."

Regina surveyed the new-comer without the slightest astonishment, but Father Sarrazin did not seem to share her indifference. From his perch in the tree-top he had witnessed the arrival of the fugitives and their preparations for a halt, but he could not distinguish their features.

Now, on finding himself for the first time face to face with the young girl, he began to stare at her with evident curiosity.

Even now he could not see her face distinctly in the darkness, but nevertheless he began to stare at her with a persistency which Roger could not fail to notice.

"Are we far from your house?" inquired Pierre Bourdier, turning to Sarrazin.

"It will take us about three quarters of an hour to reach it. Daylight will overtake us on the way."

"Is your mill occupied now?"

"Yes, five soldiers are quartered there. Two of them take turns in guarding the bridge. The three who are not on guard spend their nights in drinking, and it is more than likely that we shall find them under the table when we get there."

"Well, how about the daily inspections now?"

"Oh, we don't have them very often, but an officer drops down upon us occasionally."

"Do they examine the papers closely?"

"That depends. There's one big gendarme who knows a little French, and who tries to make people believe he reads it very well. It is not a difficult matter to deceive him. He allowed a messenger from Tours to pass last week without a word, though in spite of his linsey suit and whip he looked no more like a wagoner than I look like a bishop."

"What became of the messenger who left a week before I did?" interrupted Pierre Bourdier. "Did he reach Paris safely?"

"I heard that he was shot near Argenteuil," replied

Father Sarrazin as unconcerned as if he was alluding to some accident that had befallen a carriage.

"Indeed!" responded the pretended peddler with the same composure.

"Besides the big gendarme," continued Sarrazin, "there sometimes comes a little fellow who wears glasses. He is as cunning as a monkey, and it's no easy matter to hoodwink him, I can tell you."

"We'll do it all the same, if necessary, though," replied Bourdier. "But we must talk the matter over and see where we stand. Have you a passport?" he added, turning to the lieutenant.

"No," replied Roger, dejectedly.

"I suspected as much when you questioned me on the subject in the hut."

"All this young girl was able to do was to procure my clothing and this peddler's pack," remarked the lieutenant.

"It is very unfortunate. A man who is running about from fair to fair doesn't travel without papers."

"You see that we shall be a great hinderance to you, sir," said the officer, "and it would be better for us to part than to increase your danger."

"Such a thing is not to be thought of," exclaimed Bourdier. "We will get around the difficulty somehow. Father Sarrazin can pass you off as a new apprentice, and the young lady as a servant he just hired in Poissy."

"Yes, that might do," replied the peasant, laconically, though he had not once taken his eyes off Regina.

"That is settled then, though we must explain the situation to the girl, and it is no easy matter to talk with a deaf mute at night."

"What! she is a deaf mute!" interrupted Father Sarrazin, evidently much surprised.

"Oh! that fact need give you no uneasiness," replied Roger. "She is so clever that she seems to divine all she

can not hear, and I will take it upon myself to explain the situation to her."

"Very well; lead the way, then, my good Sarrazin."

They all walked on in silence to the edge of the forest, and then through several large fields, until they reached the top of a hill that commanded an extensive view of the surrounding country, now distinctly visible in the cold gray light of dawn.

Before them, and as far as the eye could reach, extended one of those immense plains that surround the city of Paris. To the left was a line of hills that diminished in height toward the north-east. On the right, in the distance, towered Mount Valerin, whose summit was crowned with the white smoke of the morning cannonade. The Seine flowed slowly along at the foot of this natural terrace and separated two large villages built almost directly opposite each other.

"This is Maisons Laffitte, and the village over there, on the other side of the river, is Sartrouville," remarked Pierre Bourdier.

"Is it there where we are going?" inquired Roger.

"No, no; we should fall into the very midst of a Prussian division. There is Father Sarrazin's chateau," he added, pointing to a small island that was lying at their feet.

Looking in the direction indicated Roger perceived the red roof of a building constructed upon piers on an arm of the Seine. It was a mill, unquestionably, and its isolated situation rendered it an admirable hiding-place.

Sartrouville was on the opposite side of the river, about a mile further down, but both banks of the river were now absolutely deserted.

"We shall be there in ten minutes," added Bourdier, "and then we shall have all day to rest, for we won't make the great venture until evening."

Roger now observed a fact that had escaped his notice in the darkness. The pretended peddler had his pack upon

his shoulders, so he must have found time to return to the hut for this indispensable accessory.

The lieutenant's remorse was somewhat appeased by the discovery that he had not put his brave comrade to serious inconvenience; but he could not help admiring the wonderful presence of mind of this man who forgot nothing even in the midst of imminent danger.

Father Sarrazin, who was at the head of the little procession, now conducted the party down a steep path that led directly to the mill, and Roger, as he followed, had an opportunity to examine him at his leisure.

He was a tall, old man, probably about sixty years of age, but as erect and sturdy as a poplar. In spite of the severe cold, he carried his broad-brimmed hat in his hand; but as he rarely turned to look behind him, the lieutenant could catch only an occasional glimpse of his sunburned face. Roger could but admire his stalwart shoulders, however, and no longer wondered at the strength he had displayed under the beech-tree.

"I see my boy standing in the mill door," remarked Father Sarrazin, "and that is a sure sign the Prussian inspector is here."

"Well, it is understood, is it not, that you have just brought a new apprentice and a servant from the other side of the forest, and that you picked me up on the road."

"I'm afraid this story will hardly do."

"Why?"

"On account of the deaf and dumb girl."

"You can say that she is a relative of your deceased wife, and that you have taken her out of charity."

"Well, we haven't time to invent any other story; besides, if it is the big gendarme that happens to be here we can make him believe almost anything."

"You understand, comrade?" asked Bourdier, turning to Roger.

"Yes, and I'll do my best."

THE RED BAND.

"Say as little as possible, and let me do the talking."

This rapid exchange of warnings had brought the travellers to the river bank. The mill stood directly in front of them, built upon a small wooded island that was separated from the shore by a narrow inlet over which a rough bridge had been constructed.

A stout, ruddy-faced boy, clad in a gray blouse, was standing in the door-way, tranquilly smoking his pipe. He stood with his arms folded and his eyes turned heavenward, like a philosopher who is troubling himself very little about the affairs of this world, and though he had certainly perceived his employer and his companions, he did not move a muscle.

"Well, Jack," cried Father Sarrazin, "is there anything new at the mill?"

"Nothing, master," replied the boy, with a strong Norman accent.

"And how about the Prussians?" inquired the miller, lowering his voice.

"They have been lying under the table ever since last evening, but that old fox has just come."

"Confound the luck!" muttered Father Sarrazin.

"So it is the man with the spectacles that we have to contend with, I suppose?" remarked Pierre Bourdier.

"The same."

"Well, let us keep our eyes open, and hold our tongues," responded the pretended peddler.

"Where is he now?" inquired the miller.

"He asked me where you were, so I told him you had gone to Achères, but that you would be back this morning. He growled awhile, and then said he would go and take a look around the island while he was waiting for you."

"Very well, let's get inside as quick as we can," replied the miller. "If he don't return too soon we shall be all right."

When Jack had closed the door of this primitive abode,

the fugitives found themselves in a long, low room, lighted by a single window. A tallow-candle placed in a bottle had just burned itself out upon the long table loaded with glasses and empty bottles, that stood in the middle of the room. A pile of muskets, sabers, and belts in a corner testified to the presence of hostile soldiers, though only the soles of their boots and the tops of their caps were visible.

Jack had not exaggerated. The Prussians were, indeed, sound asleep under the table. There were three of them, so far as one could judge, and their loud snoring showed that one had nothing to fear from them at present. Satisfied of this fact, the miller turned to Jack, and said, hastily:

“Show this lady and gentleman up to the blue chamber.”

As he spoke, he pointed to a ladder at the further end of the room, which seemed to lead to a loft overhead.

The lieutenant, disconcerted by this abrupt decision, appeared to hesitate, but as Ragina already had one foot on the first round of the ladder, he concluded to follow her.

On reaching the loft he saw that it was only the entrance into a long, narrow passage-way. As the fugitives traversed the loose boards that formed the floor of this passage, under the guidance of Jack, Roger caught a glimpse of the big mill-stones and the hopper below. They were consequently directly over the mill proper, and the lieutenant was wondering where this corridor would take them when their guide paused and placed his hand upon the partition.

A panel immediately flew open, revealing a long and narrow chamber.

“Step inside with the young lady, and keep very quiet,” said the miller’s boy, laconically; and they had scarcely done so before the panel closed behind them.

To Roger’s great surprise, the room, though it had no window, was not dark, for a small sky-light in the middle of the ceiling admitted the gray light of the winter’s day.

This singular hiding-place contained a bed with blue

serge hangings, three or four old arm-chairs, and a pine table.

Regina manifested no emotion or surprise, and her companion even fancied he could discern an expression of suppressed joy upon her face; but she quietly deposited her satchel on the floor, seated herself in one of the arm-chairs, and closed her eyes.

"She is overcome with fatigue," thought the lieutenant, and he firmly resolved not to disturb her slumbers.

He walked around the room on tiptoe, and was surprised to see that it seemed to have been recently occupied, for several cigar-stumps that were lying about the apartment, a pipe that was upon the table, and an empty cup that seemed to have contained coffee testified to the recent departure of some occupant of this retreat.

Roger asked himself with no little uneasiness if his captivity was likely to be a long one, and what measures his new friends would take to get rid of the Prussians.

He dared not even think of the probable consequences of the perilous undertaking in which he had embarked. His life and that of Regina were now in the hands of the man who had undertaken to save them; but he was ready to suffer anything and brave anything if he might only see Renée de Saint Senier again.

CHAPTER XV.

WHILE Roger was thus engrossed with thoughts of his beautiful cousin, the sound of a familiar voice reached his ears, and on approaching the partition to ascertain whence this sound proceeded, he discovered that there were several holes in the floor through which he could see and hear what was passing in the room below, where he had left his guide. So he looked and listened.

The miller and the pretended peddler were talking with

a pompous personage whom Roger instantly recognized from the description Father Sarrazin had given of him, for he was short and thin, and a pair of spectacles adorned his pointed nose.

The conversation had but just begun, but it had already become very animated.

"Where did you meet this man?" inquired the Prussian, in tolerably good French, but with a strong German accent.

"On the road, as I was returning from Poissy, where I went to collect some money that was due me."

"That is all very well, but why did you bring him home with you? Are you keeping a tavern now?"

"For your soldiers, yes," replied the miller, sulkily. "They certainly drink often enough at my house without paying."

"You will be repaid from the indemnity that is levied upon France when Paris is taken," replied the Prussian, majestically.

"I shall have to wait a long time, then."

Father Sarrazin could not deny himself the gratification of this reply, but it must have been very displeasing to the Prussian, for it was in a tone of intense acerbity that he repeated the question:

"What brought this man to your house?"

"He came to sell me some cloth that I need for myself and my boy. Don't you see that he is a peddler?"

"Cloth! Why, you could buy that at Maisons at the establishment of my friend Küntz, who has a fine assortment of Silesian cloths."

"If you think I have the money to pay for foreign goods you are very much mistaken. I'm not such an idiot. I've been dealing with Pierre Bourdier here for five years, at least, and know that he won't cheat me, while your man— Well, the less said about him the better."

"You are very much mistaken. My friend Küntz would not have charged you any more for it," interrupted the

Prussian, who probably had an interest in his friend's business.

"Possibly not; but I prefer to deal with one of my own countrymen."

The subject of this conversation had as yet taken no part in it, but was sitting astride a chair, tranquilly rolling a cigarette, and this fact struck Roger, who had never seen him smoke anything but a pipe before.

The spy, seeing that no further information was to be extorted from the miller, now turned abruptly to Pierre Bourdier.

"Well, my good fellow, did you have a pretty fair run of business at Saint Germain?" he inquired, with an affectation of friendliness.

The trap was too palpable for the messenger to fall into it.

"I did not come round that way; I am just from Poissy," he replied, promptly.

"And where are you bound?"

"I haven't decided yet whether I shall spend the night at Maisons or go down as far as Herblay. You have some troops near Pontoise, and perhaps I should be able to sell them some goods."

"You had better come and have a talk with my friend Küntz. You may be able to sell him a good part of your merchandise."

"I'll think about it," replied the pretended peddler, while Sarrazin muttered:

"He'll take your goods; there's no doubt of that, but as for paying for them, that's a very different matter."

"I suppose you have a passport, my friend?" said the Prussian, ignoring the miller's remark.

"If I hadn't I should have been in prison long ago. I have been asked to show it at least a dozen times since I left Evreux, a week ago."

"Will you show it to me?"

"With pleasure," replied the messenger, drawing a shabby wallet from his pocket, and quietly handing it to the commissioner.

The situation was becoming alarming, and Roger trembled as he recollected that his brave friend could not have had time to get rid of his dispatches before the spy's entrance.

"If that scoundrel searches him, he is lost," Roger said to himself.

"Bourdier—Pierre," spelled out the commissioner, "on his way to Beauvais. It has two indorsements upon it, so you are all right," he added, returning the wallet. "Now I should like to see the contents of your pack, merely for form's sake."

"As you please," said the pretended peddler, beginning to unstrap his heavy pack.

"His papers are certainly not concealed there," thought Roger, somewhat reassured by the turn affairs had taken.

Forgetting the dignity his shoulder-straps conferred upon him, the Prussian knelt and assisted Bourdier in emptying his pack. The pieces of cloth and of calico were all shaken out, the red and yellow handkerchiefs were unfolded, shaken and carefully turned over. The messenger of the Army of the Loire submitted to this examination with the best possible grace, occasionally calling the miller's attention to the merits of some particular article of merchandise, and playing his part so well that Roger was overcome with admiration.

"Now, my worthy friend, I shall be obliged to examine your clothing," remarked the Prussian, when the examination of the pack was concluded. "It's a mere form, of course, and I must also request you to take off your shoes, and—"

"In short, to undress myself," interrupted the pretended peddler, coolly. "It isn't very warm weather, but I

know that is the German fashion of doing things; so I'll have to make the best of it."

Roger's blood curdled in his veins when he saw his friend remove his blouse.

"It won't take long," said the Prussian, blandly.

"Well, just give me time to light a cigarette. That will help to keep me warm," replied Bourdier, laughing.

As he spoke, he drew from his pocket a package of tobacco and a tiny blank book from which he detached a leaf.

"Hand me that book," said the spy, his small gray eyes gleaming eagerly through his spectacles.

"It is only some pure linen paper that I bought in Rouen," said Bourdier, passing the little book to the Prussian.

Roger, who did not miss a single detail of this scene, fancied that the hand of the pretended peddler trembled slightly, and that his cheeks lost a little of their ruddiness.

At the same instant, the miller rose from the stool on which he had been sitting, and took a step forward.

As he did so, he slipped his hand under his blouse, and his features assumed a peculiar expression.

The Prussian did not notice the fact, however, for he had taken the little blank book and was examining it with the closest attention. While he was thus engaged, the messenger from the Army of the Loire leisurely rolled up the leaf he had detached, and after manufacturing a very neat cigarette, he placed it between his lips, and began to fumble about in his pocket for a match.

"Shall I make you one?" he asked tranquilly.

"No, thank you; I never smoke anything but a pipe," growled the Teuton, who seemed greatly disappointed at his failure to find anything of a compromising nature.

"Did you suppose there was anything contraband in my blank book?" asked Bourdier, rather sullenly.

"No; but I like to examine thoroughly when I examine at all. You Frenchmen are so sly that I'm always on the lookout for you," replied the Prussian.

He concluded to return the innocent blank book to its owner, however, and the pretended peddler slipped it into his waistcoat-pocket, remarking:

"Oh, I understand! You are looking for letters and dispatches. I have heard that there are men who carry them about sewed up in their clothing. You need have no fears of my doing anything like that. I set too much value on my life."

As he spoke he took his cigarette between his middle and forefinger.

"You are right, my friend," said the spy, blandly. "If I found a single line of writing anywhere about your person I should be obliged to send you to the commandant at Maisons, and he would have you shot without any ceremony."

"You won't be put to that trouble, I assure you," replied Bourdier. "But what a pity it is that I've lost my matches," he added, placing his cigarette behind his ear, as a book-keeper does his pen.

"You can have your smoke by and by," interposed Father Sarrazin. "You must remember that this gentleman is waiting for you to undress."

"That is true; I had forgotten it," replied the messenger, with the most natural air imaginable. "I won't be long now."

And he began to divest himself of his garments with the methodical slowness peculiar to peasants.

As each garment was removed the Prussian seized it, and subjected it to a rigorous examination. The pockets were emptied, the linings were ripped from the outside, the sleeves turned inside out, and the buttons carefully tested to see if they were hollow. Even the soles and heels of the peddler's shoes were probed with a small pointed instrument that the Prussians carried about with them for this purpose.

Roger watched the whole singular performance with the

closest attention, but the perfect calmness with which Pierre Bourdier witnessed the proceedings reassured the lieutenant in regard to the result, though he could not imagine how the messenger had managed to conceal the dispatches from the Prussian.

"He must have found some way of getting them into the miller's hands," he thought.

The brave messenger dressed himself with the same deliberation he had displayed in undressing, remarking very good-naturedly:

"Well, captain, aren't you going to pay for some hot punch to cure the cold you have made me take. This mill of yours isn't a very warm place, Father Sarrazin."

"We'll see," replied the Prussian. "At all events, you had better accompany me down to Maisons, and have a little talk with my friend Küntz about business matters."

"I'm sure I've no objections," Bourdier answered. "My friend Sarrazin here is in no hurry, and we can finish our trade this evening just as well as this morning."

As soon as he had put on his blouse he proceeded to rearrange his pack.

Roger was not prepared for this prompt acceptance of the Prussian's invitation, but he finally concluded that the messenger must have his plans, and he had already given abundant evidence of his ability to take care of himself.

"I am ready," he said, after a moment, shouldering his pack.

"Very well, we'll be off, then," said the Prussian. "Give me just a moment to say a word or two to our good friend, the miller. In the first place, Father Sarrazin, I must request you to give these soldiers no more liquor."

"But how can I help it? When I refuse them liquor they threaten to burst open the door of my cellar."

"They're a set of drunken scoundrels, and I shall report them to the commandant, and he will see that they are punished when the other guard relieves them to-morrow.

I noticed, too, as I walked around the island just now, that the rope at the ferry has not been removed. I shall send some men to unfasten it and take it to the commandant. It may be of service to our pontoniers, besides, you might be tempted to make use of it in crossing the river."

"Crossing the river? In what, pray? You have taken away the boat, and unless one is a bird—"

"In the meantime I shall station a sentinel on the river bank," continued the imperturbable Prussian, "and shall give him orders to fire upon any one who approaches it."

The miller shrugged his shoulders.

"I warn you so you may avoid any accident," added the Prussian, with a malicious smile.

After uttering this warning, which sounded very like a threat, he said a few words to the soldiers; then, with ironical politeness he motioned Pierre Bourdier to precede him to the door, and left the room with measured tread.

"He is taking Bourdier to prison," thought Roger, and the conjecture seemed extremely probable.

An hour probably passed in thinking over this adventure and in gazing alternately at Regina, who was still asleep, and then down into the room below where Father Sarrazin was moving about in the midst of the soldiers who had now recovered from their intoxication sufficiently to light their pipes, which they sat puffing in silence.

The lieutenant was beginning to wonder what had become of the miller's boy when he saw the door of the mill open and the lad enter, pushing in front of him a ragged urchin whom Roger instantly recognized.

"The beggar boy!" muttered Roger.

It was indeed he, looking even more dirty and ragged than on his first appearance, but wearing the same doleful and hypocritical expression of countenance.

"What have you got there?" demanded Father Sarrazin, who seemed to be in the worst of humor since Bourdier's departure.

"It's a young rascal I found sitting on the end of the bridge. He says he's hungry, and that he's got no place to sleep."

"That is no concern of mine," growled the miller. "One would soon be eaten out of house and home if one felt obliged to entertain all the vagabonds who are prowling about the country nowadays."

"Oh, my kind sir, take pity on a poor unfortunate boy who hasn't had a mouthful to eat for two days," drawled the *gamin*, in his doleful, whining voice.

"Do you live in this neighborhood?"

"No; I am from Normandy."

"Why didn't you stay there, then?"

"The Prussians burned our house," replied the boy, though not without casting a side glance at the soldiers, who were smoking their pipes without troubling themselves in the least about this conversation, however.

"The little wretch feels confident that they don't understand French," thought Roger.

"But where are your relatives?" asked the miller, really touched now.

"My father is in the army, and they've taken my poor mother to prison," said the young scoundrel, wiping his perfectly dry eyes.

"Come, come, my child, don't cry, but tell me where you came from, and where you are going," said the kind-hearted miller.

"I've begged my way from Gisors, and I'm going straight on until I can find work."

"What can you do?"

"At home I minded the cows, but I could work in your mill, I am sure."

"Well," said Father Sarrazin, after a moment's reflection, "the mill is not running now, and I need no assistant but Jack here, but it shall never be said that I allowed a soldier's son to perish of hunger."

"If he keeps the boy we are lost," muttered Roger, who had listened to this conversation with the liveliest apprehensions.

"Take him to the pantry, Jack, and give him a big piece of bread, and something to drink," said the miller.

"Thank you, my kind sir," drawled the beggar, following Jack, who seemed to share his master's feeling of sympathy.

The Prussians had taken no apparent notice of the scene, but as soon as the boy and his guide left the room they exchanged several remarks, the meaning of which Roger did not understand, unfortunately. As for Father Sarrazin, he wore the satisfied air of a man who has just performed a worthy action, but never had the lieutenant experienced a greater feeling of perplexity, for he perceived the danger, but saw no way of averting it.

Father Sarrazin had never seen the young rascal before, and evidently had no idea of his real character, but Roger could not doubt that the boy's object in seeking an asylum at the mill was to perpetrate some act of treachery. A word to the miller would have sufficed to put him on his guard, but how was he to say this word?

To call to the miller was out of the question, as this would reveal Roger's presence to the Germans, so he would be obliged to wait until some one came to release him, and how could he tell when that would be?

"Regina continued to sleep on peacefully, and Roger could not bear the thought of waking her.

"She does not know that death is perhaps near her," thought the lieutenant, "but she will hear of the danger that threatens us soon enough."

And feeling greatly fatigued himself, he stretched himself out upon the bed at the further end of the room, and began to reflect upon their strange situation.

This ominous reappearance of the mendicant seemed in-

explicable to him, especially as he had supposed from Bourdier's rather curt replies that they were rid of the little wretch forever.

The enforced departure of the pretended peddler was not reassuring by any means, and this strange combination of circumstances was certainly sufficiently ominous to trouble the most sanguine mind, but Roger finally comforted himself with the thought that Providence had not entirely abandoned them, as the traitor, if he had arrived an hour sooner, would have met the pretended peddler and certainly denounced him.

But the peril that now threatened them was no less great, for if Pierre Bourdier should return he would find himself face to face with this young vagabond, and a failure to return would complicate matters terribly.

The lieutenant had only a very vague idea of the route they would have to take to reach Paris. He knew that he would be obliged to cross the Seine at least twice, but how was he to cross a river swollen by the winter rains and guarded by Prussians sentinels?

Though he tried hard to solve this difficult problem he utterly failed in the attempt, and gradually an intense drowsiness stole over him, and he at last fell asleep, murmuring the names of Renée and Regina.

When he woke night had come.

A hand laid gently upon his shoulder made him open his eyes, and as he had been a prey to dire misgivings when he fell asleep his first thought when he woke was that an enemy was standing over him, and his first impulse was to assume a defensive attitude, though he had the presence of mind to recollect that the Prussians were not far off, and that he must make no outcry.

Profound darkness and absolute silence reigned around him, but a voice that he did not recognize at first finally put an end to his perplexity.

"It is I," whispered the voice.

"Who are you?" inquired Roger, only partially reassured by this vague announcement.

"Bourdier, of course," replied the voice, in the same tone.

"The peddler!" exclaimed the astonished lieutenant.

"Hush! not so loud. The walls have ears here."

"You are right. But how glad I am to see you again. How did you manage to escape from that miserable spy?"

"It cost me all my merchandise, for I was obliged to offer it to his friend Küntz to propitiate him; but that doesn't matter, for the time of playing peddler is past, thank Heaven!"

"What! have you abandoned all hope of reaching Paris?"

"By no means; I hope to be there to-morrow."

"With your dispatches?"

"Most assuredly."

"Were you really able to conceal them from the inspector. It seemed to me this morning—"

"That the inspector examined me from head to foot. So he did."

"Is it possible that you had time to intrust them to the miller's keeping?"

"No, the old scoundrel came into the room only a minute after you left it."

"But where did you hide your papers when you undressed?"

"Did you notice my cigarette?"

"What! was that—"

"Yes; the message that would have caused me to be shot without the slightest doubt was on the scrap of paper I quietly rolled up under his very nose."

"So that was what made you turn pale when he took the blank book."

"I can't deny it. Even in these days one can't help feeling a little emotion when one realizes that at any moment it may become necessary to use the knife."

"Use the knife!" repeated Roger, utterly bewildered.

"Yes," said the messenger, tranquilly. "Father Sarrazin, who was in my confidence, was already feeling for his under his blouse, and if the Prussian had made any attempt to touch the scrap of paper I had just rolled up he would have stabbed him to the heart."

"And the soldiers!"

"Oh, I should have sprung for their sabers, which were in a corner of the room, and I think that between us we should have succeeded in managing them; but such rows always make a good deal of noise, and I was glad to be spared the necessity."

"God, indeed, seems to have been watching over us," murmured Roger, thinking of the terrible danger he had unconsciously run.

"And He will watch over us until the end, you may rest assured."

"I hope so, though I cannot help wondering how we are to make our escape from here."

"I will attend to that. But where is the young lady?"

The question reminded the lieutenant of a fact that his surprise and emotion had caused him to forget for an instant. He had left Regina sleeping in an arm-chair, and it was now time to wake her. But he was spared the trouble of seeking her in the darkness, for at the very moment that Pierre Bourdier made the inquiry a slight pressure of the hand warned Roger that Regina was standing beside him.

"She is here," he hastened to reply, "and I will answer for her willingness and courage to brave any dangers to which we may be exposed in the future."

"The first stage of our journey is probably the most difficult," replied the pretended peddler, "for we shall be obliged to cross the Seine only about ten yards from here."

"That is exactly what I thought; but I heard the Prussian say that all the boats had been taken away."

"If we only had a few hours to spare there wouldn't be the slightest difficulty about it," said Bourdier, without paying any apparent heed to the objection advanced by the lieutenant.

"Why?"

"The thermometer is falling rapidly, and I feel sure that by to-morrow morning the river will be frozen hard enough for us to cross dry-shod. But we can not wait for that, so we must devise some other way."

"Some other way? There is none, or at least—"

"There is a rope that my friend Sarrazin has taken care to preserve, and that may enable us to reach the other side."

"I don't understand you."

"My plan is very simple, however. All that will be required is good strong hands, and that is why I asked if we could depend upon your little friend here. I do not doubt her courage, but I am not sure of her strength."

The programme which the messenger announced so tranquilly was certainly of a nature to make the boldest heart quail, and the aerial voyage he wished to make was certainly not very well suited to a young girl, but a slight pressure of the hand reminded Roger that his companion had never been daunted by any obstacle.

"I—I think she is quite capable of making the attempt," he stammered; "but have you considered well the other dangers that threaten us?—these soldiers, only a few feet from us, and the sentinels the inspector has stationed on the river bank at the very place where the rope is fastened, I heard him say."

"Oh, Father Sarrazin and his boy will attend to them," said Pierre Bourdier, a little scornfully. "He has plenty of liquor on hand, and the three soldiers who are not on guard to-night are already sound asleep under the table, as drunk as drunk can be. As for the sentinels, the cold will keep them close prisoners in their boxes, besides, Jack will keep an eye on them."

"But some one may warn them."

"And ~~who~~ pray? There are no traitors here that I know of."

"You are very much mistaken; there is at least one."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that that wretched little beggar is here."

"What! the boy that came to the hut?"

"The same. He arrived about an hour after you left."

"It serves me right for not having crushed the little viper when I had him in my power. If I had only wrung his neck instead of gagging him and tying him to a tree he would not be playing the spy on us now. But why didn't Father Sarrazin send the young imp away?"

"He did think of sending him away at first, but when he saw him cry and heard him declare that he was starving he told his boy to give him something to eat and a place to sleep."

"In that case he is probably somewhere about the house still."

"That is only too certain."

A profound silence followed this brief conversation. The messenger was trying to invent some means of averting the probable consequences of this unfortunate complication.

"I have it!" exclaimed the worthy messenger.

"What?"

"A means of making our escape from here before that young imp of Satan can denounce us."

"Heaven grant it!"

"Do you know where Father Sarrazin sleeps?"

"No; I was so overcome with fatigue that I fell asleep soon after that young scoundrel was intrusted to Jack's care, and I did not wake until just now."

"Still, I have an idea where they put the boy to-night, and there is a possibility of our getting away without encountering him, though it is more than likely that he will

steal out and wander around the mill some time during the night, so we must be ahead of him."

"God grant that it is not too late already."

"No, it is scarcely seven o'clock, and that is the supper hour here. The young scoundrel is probably engaged in eating his soup."

"But are you sure that he did not see you when you returned?"

"Perfectly sure. As you may suppose, I didn't think it advisable to come in by the front door and exhibit myself to the Prussians."

"But how did you get in?"

"By means of a ladder on the outside of the house, for the dark passage has two outlets, as well as the room we are in."

"Two outlets," repeated Roger, who knew of none except the trap-door through which he had gained an entrance.

"Yes, and you have only to look up to see the one that we are going to use."

"What! do you mean that sky-light?"

"Precisely. It seems to be intended for the use of cats rather than human beings; still, I didn't promise you a trip in a Pullman car."

"I am ready to follow you anywhere, and so is my companion," responded Roger, somewhat offended by this rather brusque language; "but I must admit that I do not understand your plan very clearly."

"This sky-light opens upon the roof of a small wooden L that has been added to the mill. This same roof serves as a support for the rope formerly used at the ferry, for this is one of the ferries where passengers are transported across the river by means of a cable. Do you begin to understand my plan, now?"

Roger understood it very well, but he was not a little inclined to shrink from such an undertaking, especially as

he did not believe Regina's strength would be equal to it.

"But the journey must be a long one, and attended with many difficulties, for the mill is not on the river proper," he remarked.

"The mill isn't more than fifteen yards from the river, and the Seine is not very broad at this point."

The lieutenant was too deeply engrossed in thought to make any response for some time, and Bourdier, misunderstanding the cause of this silence, added ironically:

"True, it is very deep."

"A fall would be certain death," muttered Roger.

"Listen, lieutenant," said the pretended peddler, curtly; "I have not the slightest intention of compelling you to accompany me, for if any misfortune should befall either you or the young girl, I should never forgive myself while I live, so you are at perfect liberty to follow me or to remain where you are."

"But how about yourself?" inquired Roger, timidly.

"Oh, that is a very different matter. I must be in Paris to-morrow morning, or perish this night; but you are not the bearer of dispatches, and there is much less necessity for you to risk your own life. For that reason, unless your heart urges you to make the venture, I advise you to remain here. Father Sarrazin will pay you a visit to-morrow morning; you can then tell him your story, and he will find a way to get you safely to Normandy."

The lieutenant's perplexity was great. He had to choose between almost certain death and a long series of perilous adventures. He would not have hesitated, however, had he been alone, but the idea of thus imperiling Regina's life appalled him.

"Under any other circumstances," continued Bourdier, in gentler tones, "I would change my own plans in order to keep your company and endeavor to be of service to you a second time, but duty forbids."

These simple words touched Roger deeply.

"After all, it was a mere chance that brought us together," continued the brave messenger, "so we can part without having any cause to reproach ourselves; and if I perish by the way, I shall still have the consolation of knowing that I have been of service to a French officer."

This was too much. The lieutenant could not withstand the recollection Pierre Bourdier had just invoked.

He thought of the scenes in the forest, and spurned the idea of separating his fortunes from those of his preserver. He had but one scruple. He felt anxious to consult Regina, though his heart told him that the heroic young girl was ready to follow him, but the decision was such a momentous one that he still hesitated.

Another pressure from the young girl's hand decided him, however, and he said, firmly:

"I will not desert you. We will make the venture together."

"Good!" exclaimed Bourdier, "I knew you would accompany me."

"Tell me what we have to do," said Roger, quietly, for the decision once made, all his wonted coolness returned.

"You will soon see."

And without further delay, the messenger from the Army of the Loire began his preparations for flight.

The first thing to be done was to reach the sky-light, but though the ceiling was low, some kind of a step-ladder was absolutely necessary.

The table and a chair furnished it, and in spite of the darkness, Bourdier succeeded in moving and arranging these two articles of furniture without making the slightest noise.

"There is your staircase," he said, gayly, "and I will show you the way up, though, as I suppose my friend Sarrazin has not dared to send you any dinner, I will first do what I can to atone for the omission."

He placed a large cake of chocolate in Roger's hand, and a gourd filled with brandy.

"You must divide with the young lady, and eat as we go along, but take a good drink of brandy before you start."

The lieutenant required no urging, for he felt that he really needed the stimulant. Nor did Regina refuse the gourd her friend held out to her, but bravely took a swallow of the fiery liquid as if to prove that she was capable of manly deeds if need be.

"By thus hastening the hour of our departure is there not some danger that we may upset the worthy miller's plans?" inquired Roger. "It may be that he has made arrangements to assist us by and by, and—"

"Very possibly, but we must dispense with his assistance. The all important thing now is not to give this infernal scoundrel time to denounce us."

"But how shall we carry our packs?"

"We are not going to take them."

"But if we should be arrested?"

"If we are arrested, we shall be shot," replied the messenger, with unruffled calmness; "but we are not going to be arrested. You see," he added, "that one can play the part of a peddler outside the Prussian lines, but within their lines it would be worse than useless to assume such a rôle, and we have too far to go to-night to hamper ourselves with any unnecessary burdens."

"I think you are right," said Roger, feeling that the hour had indeed come for them to burn their ships behind them.

"And now I will lead the way," resumed Bourdier, climbing upon the table. "Let the young lady follow me and you bring up the rear."

In another minute Bourdier had cautiously lifted the sky-light and stepped out upon the roof. The heavens were clear and thickly studded with stars.

"Pass up the girl," Pierre whispered, leaning over the edge of the opening. Regina must have divined what was expected of her, for she was on the table before her friend had time to come to her assistance, and the rest of the ascent was accomplished easily and noiselessly.

The fugitives found themselves upon a sort of platform exactly corresponding in size with the room below them.

"Don't move," whispered Bourdier. "I want to reconnoiter a little."

As he spoke, he crawled softly to the edge of the roof, and for an instant Roger was strongly tempted to follow him; but a gesture warned him that he was to remain motionless—a gesture that said as plainly as any words—

"Have a care! There is danger."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE night was clear and very cold. From the place where he stood Roger could not see what was going on close to the house, but he could plainly distinguish the trees on the right bank of the Seine.

He could also hear the peculiar grating and crackling sound made by blocks of ice when they are brought in contact with one another by the current.

The Seine, as Bourdier had said, was only a few yards from the mill: the wind was blowing from the north, but too feebly to drown the sounds of earth and river, and the conditions were anything but favorable. A tempest that would have tossed the branches wildly to and fro and covered the sky with clouds would have made the venture of the fugitives much less dangerous.

The brave messenger probably realized the difficulties of the undertaking more fully since he had climbed upon the roof, for his every movement was characterized by the utmost caution. Lying flat upon his stomach, with only

his head projecting beyond the eaves, he seemed to be gazing attentively at something on the ground below.

The temperature was frigid, and though Roger was accustomed to spending his nights in the open air, he soon felt that his limbs were becoming benumbed, and that it would be impossible for Regina to endure this exposure long. At last, unable to bear the suspense any longer, the lieutenant resolved to join the pretended peddler, and creeping along with infinite care he finally succeeded in reaching the messenger's side.

No sooner had he done so than these words were whispered softly in his ear:

"Have you good eyesight?"

"Yes."

"Then look up the river bank on this side of the stream, and tell me what you see there."

Both as a hunter and as a soldier Roger had had a host of opportunities to test his powers of vision, but now the partial obscurity and the intense cold impaired his sight considerably; nevertheless, he fancied he could discern a tiny black speck in close proximity to three or four stunted trees on the left bank of the stream, a short distance from the mill, and after fixing his visual organs upon this tiny speck for several seconds he became satisfied that it was moving, though slowly, and, in fact, almost imperceptibly. Sometimes it even disappeared from sight altogether, but when it became visible again one could see that its position had undergone a change.

About fifty yards from the trees and a little to the left of them was a dark object that strongly resembled, at least in shape, the hut of a savage, and a careful scrutiny satisfied Roger that it was one of those huts constructed out of the branches of trees that were first introduced into France by the soldiers who had taken part in African campaigns.

The Prussians, being eminently practical people, did not disdain to make use of them during their campaign; and

Roger had come across them more than once. He concluded, therefore, that the Prussian sentinel to whom the task of guarding the river had been intrusted, was probably concealed in this cabin.

"Do you see it?" whispered Pierre Bourdier, suddenly.

"What?"

"The black speck that seems to be moving slowly toward the hut. I am satisfied now. It is that young imp of Satan. He scents blood, and so went out to prowl about the ferry, but seeing nothing, he has gone to warm himself in the hut with his friend the Prussian. This shows that he is ignorant of the fact that we are in the mill. If he knew it he would have summoned the enemy to search the house long before this."

"I think you are right; but what are we to do?"

"Depart!"

"Depart!" repeated Roger, forgetting to lower his voice in his astonishment. "Depart, when this young scoundrel may surprise us when we are half-way across the river."

"We have no choice. Listen; the night will be long, I admit; but a journey from here to Paris is not a promenade through the Bois, so we can not afford to waste any time."

"That is true; but—"

"But now it is not at all probable that the little wretch will make his appearance again for hours. Vipers love warmth; and he is not likely to leave it to make another round until just before midnight. This, then, is the best time for our flight, and we must take advantage of it."

The lieutenant admitted the justice of this reasoning; but the nearer the moment of peril approached the more he trembled for Regina.

"I will go first," continued Bourdier; "you will send the girl next, and you will constitute the rear guard."

"So be it."

"I will explain why I wish this order observed," continued Bourdier. "If the opposite bank of the river is

guarded, the first one to cross will be caught; and it had better be me than you. If any accident befalls me you will still have it in your power to return to your hiding-place and wait until Father Sarrazin comes to release you."

"Thank you," said Roger, moved almost to tears by this generosity.

"You can thank me when we get to Paris. Now let us complete our arrangements. It will take me nearly ten minutes to reach the opposite shore, so you had better send the girl just a quarter of an hour after I start. If I am unfortunate enough to be arrested on reaching land, I will shout three times to warn you."

And without waiting for any reply the intrepid Bourdier seized the rope and started on his dangerous journey. Roger had neglected to ask him the best mode of accomplishing it; and though he was anxious to rejoin Regina, he deemed it advisable to remain upon the edge of the roof to see how Bourdier managed.

The latter seemed to be endowed with a remarkable talent for this kind of exercise, for he advanced with wonderful rapidity.

With both hands tightly clutching the rope, about which he had crossed his legs, he dragged himself along like a serpent, and did it so dexterously that the frail support scarcely moved.

The iron staple to which the rope was attached, and which was firmly imbedded in the roof, emitted a slight creaking sound when Bourdier first seized the rope, but the strain upon it once regulated, all became quiet again.

The critical moment of the transit would soon come, however, the moment when the row of willows was to be crossed, and Pierre Bourdier was fast approaching this dangerous spot.

The cable, though raised to a very considerable height above the ground at the end, of course descended gradually from that point to the river; and at the wharf, where the

ferry-boat had been moored, the rope was only about five and a half feet from the ground.

Roger, pale with anxiety, saw the messenger disappear behind the willows, around which the little spy had vanished a few minutes before.

His very breath seemed to leave him, so terrible was the suspense; but fortunately it was of short duration. Indeed, scarcely twenty seconds had elapsed before he saw his intrepid companion emerge from behind the curtain of the willows, and Roger lifted his heart in fervent prayer to God to protect the courageous man who was thus imperiling his life for the sake of his native land.

God heard the prayer, for the form of the messenger was soon lost in the protecting shadow of the opposite bank.

Joy filled the heart of the lieutenant, for the profound silence that brooded over the stream was a certain indication of success.

"If any misfortune had befallen him," thought Roger, "I should have known it before this time. If he had encountered one of the enemy on the opposite shore he would have shouted to me, and if his strength had failed him and he had fallen, I should have heard the noise made by his fall."

He listened a moment longer, but no sound broke the stillness of the night, and the lieutenant heaved a sigh of relief.

The time for making the frightful venture had come for him—or rather for Regina—and even now she stood beside him ready and waiting; but though the young girl evinced neither fear nor reluctance, the idea of allowing her to make the dangerous journey alone seemed a positive crime to him, and reflection only convinced him of the advantages of a plan that had previously occurred to him.

"The rope is evidently strong enough to support the weight of two persons," thought the lieutenant; and he resolved that nothing should prevent him from leaving the roof at the same time that the young girl did.

"I would rather perish with her," he murmured, "than remain here tortured by a thousand doubts and fears while she is hanging between life and death."

This resolve once made, there was nothing to be done but to carry it into execution as quickly as possible, for a single moment of delay might prove fatal.

But should he go first or follow the young girl along the rope?

She decided the question.

Turning, she lifted her face to his, and he, understanding her motive, pressed a chaste kiss upon her brow—the first, and perhaps the last.

Regina received it with eyes downcast; but when she lifted them again they shone with such brilliancy that one would have supposed that this salute, which might be one of farewell, had given her fresh courage.

With wonderful celerity and skill she seized the rope and assumed a position the direct opposite of that chosen by Bourdier—that is to say, with her feet first and her face turned toward the roof of the mill.

The lieutenant had neither the time nor the means to indicate an easier mode of locomotion; besides, he fancied he understood the feeling that prompted the girl to turn her face toward him in this moment of supreme danger.

"If we are to die," he thought, "we can at least exchange a parting glance."

He, in turn, now ventured upon the rope, for she was already far enough off for him to be able to stretch his body out upon this slender support which sagged slightly on receiving this additional burden.

The journey from the roof to the willows was accomplished without accident; but on reaching this point the lieutenant perceived that the arm of the river which they had to cross was broad enough to terrify the most daring; and though he did not feel fatigued himself, it seemed to him that his companion was advancing a little less rapidly.

She reached the stream, however, without manifesting the slightest weakness or hesitation; and Roger began to take heart again.

As he dragged himself slowly along after her he gazed around him, and had the inexpressible satisfaction of perceiving that no human being was visible upon the river bank.

The sullen roar of the river nearly deafened him, accompanied as it was by ominous cracking sounds as the blocks of ice that nearly covered its surface were swept swiftly along beneath him by the power of the current. Sometimes, however, the whole mass paused, delayed by a collision with other floating blocks, only to resume its course as soon as the obstruction was removed; but it was very evident that the river would soon be frozen over entirely, and that by delaying their departure a few hours they would have been able to cross it on foot.

Each moment brought the fugitives nearer to their goal; but each effort increased their fatigue.

The cold was intense, and a keen wind was blowing from the north. Roger felt his blood gradually freezing in his veins and his limbs becoming rigid; and he said to himself that Regina's frail body could not endure such suffering long.

They had reached the middle of the stream; but the remainder of the journey would be much more difficult. Just then Roger cast a hurried glance behind him to see how much of the distance they had traversed, and as he did so he fancied he could see a human form moving about on the shore of the island.

His position upon the rope did not allow him to prolong this examination, and turning his eyes from the shore he had left behind him he resumed his perilous journey; but either because the cold was gaining upon him or the discovery he had just made had unnerved him, he felt much less strong and supple. Nervous tremors traversed his be-

numbed limbs, and he felt as if a thousand needles were being plunged into his flesh. In short, he recognized with terror the usual symptoms of cramp, and if they increased to the extent of paralyzing him he was lost.

The lieutenant, who was an excellent swimmer, knew by experience that absolute immobility was the only means of averting a danger of this kind. He accordingly paused to wait until the feeling had worn off, keeping his body in a horizontal position, with his head slightly thrown back.

Regina's powers of vision must have been keen enough to make up for her inability to hear, and she must also have retained her presence of mind in a remarkable degree, for her companion had scarcely decided to pause before she followed his example.

She did not seem at all exhausted by her prolonged and arduous efforts, and her eyes did not once wander from Roger's drawn features.

One might have supposed she was watching for the moment when she would be obliged to offer him assistance, and the lieutenant, in spite of his strength, seemed likely to require it. Cramp had not paralyzed him completely, but he was struggling against an enemy even more formidable—the cold.

So long as he had been straining every nerve to drag himself along the rope, the exertion had kept his blood in rapid circulation; but as soon as he relaxed his efforts he was at the mercy of the bitter north wind.

The death of so many French soldiers in Russia was due to the same cause. During the disastrous retreat of 1812 every man who paused fell asleep, and each soldier that fell asleep was a dead man.

A few seconds more, and the lieutenant, overcome by the cold, would be sleeping forever in the Seine.

His hands and knees still clutched the rope, it is true, but the bitter cold would unlock them and cast him into the watery depths below.

This agony lasted less time than it has taken to describe it, but it had a witness, and just as he was about to let go the rope, Roger felt a hand laid upon his, and some hard object pressed against his set teeth.

Instinctively he opened his lips, and a fiery liquid burned his palate and set his heart to throbbing violently.

The dying man opened his eyes and uttered a cry of relief.

He was saved. The girl had just poured a mouthful of the brandy from Pierre Bourdier's gourd between Roger's parted lips.

Her devotion and energy had accomplished the wonderful feat of holding herself suspended from the rope with one hand, while with the other she raised the reviving cordial to her friend's lips. If Roger had been in a condition to really understand what had occurred, he would have been tempted to believe in some supernatural intervention if he had not recollected Regina's former calling, for only the most intrepid acrobat could have performed such a feat.

The officer was not yet able to collect his scattered thoughts, however, but in proportion as the exhilarating influence of the stimulant quickened his blood and relaxed his limbs, his mental powers returned, and his eyes were directed first upon the face of his faithful companion and then upon the right bank of the stream.

A loud and sudden shout restored his self-possession completely. It came from the left bank, and it was impossible for any soldier to mistake its character, even if it had not been followed by the shrill whistle of a bullet through the air, and a hurried glance back at the island showed him, through the slight fog, two shadowy forms moving about the hut. Consequently, there was little room for doubt that it was the Prussian sentinel accompanied by the little beggar.

The danger was becoming so great that little chance of escape remained, but great as the peril was, Roger confronted it calmly.

Cramp had overtaken him when he was a little more than half-way across the stream, and only about fifty yards more were to be traversed to reach the right bank of the river, but this was the most difficult part of the journey, as the course of the rope was upward on nearing the shore, as it was probably fastened to the trunk of some large tree.

That shore remained silent, however, for the report had awakened only an echo.

The lieutenant, who had now entirely recovered from his momentary weakness, felt sure that he had sufficient strength to reach the promised land, and Regina, who had seen the flash, even if she had not heard the report, had already resumed her difficult journey with redoubled energy, being reassured now in regard to her companion's welfare. The fugitives could scarcely hope that the Prussian would not repeat the shot; besides, his comrades could not be far off, and if they rushed to the river bank to see what was the matter, as seemed only too probable, the aerial travelers would find themselves exposed to the fire of the entire party.

A second shot resounded from the willows.

The aim was closer this time, and it must have struck the bank, for Roger heard a dull thud after the projectile whistled by.

"The third bullet will hit the mark," he thought. "Heaven grant it may be me that it strikes!"

At that very instant the harsh voice of the young beggar reached Roger's ears. He could not distinguish the words, but the shrill, excited tones indicated that he was inciting the sentinel to renewed efforts.

During the interval between the shots, the fugitives had traversed a distance of several yards, but the situation of the two seemed reversed now.

It was the young girl who showed unmistakable signs of exhaustion, and it was the lieutenant, on the contrary, who watched over her.

Suddenly he turned his head. A violent oscillation of

the rope had nearly precipitated them both into the Seine.

"This time we are lost," said Roger, seeing the condition of things on the island.

The cries of the Prussian and the wretched little beggar must have attracted other soldiers to the spot, for quite a little group had collected around the willows, over which the rope passed.

They were too far off, and the night was not sufficiently clear for Roger to see what they were doing. The firing had ceased, however, either because the sentinel's stock of ammunition was exhausted, or because, discouraged by his failure, he had resolved to resort to some other means of accomplishing his purpose.

The right bank was still too far off for the fugitives to have much chance of reaching it. In fact, the best of swimmers could not have contended with the current at this point, and even if Roger had been strong enough to make his way through the cold, turbulent water he would have been crushed by the blocks of floating ice. But after swaying violently to and fro for a moment, the cable ceased to oscillate.

What infernal scheme could the Prussians be meditating now? Roger thought, on perceiving a black speck detach itself from the line of trees. It seemed to be suspended in midair, and to be slowly advancing toward the fugitives.

The cessation of the firing and that sudden oscillation of the rope were explained now. Evidently one of the hostile party had decided to follow the fugitives on their perilous journey.

On perceiving this new danger, the lieutenant redoubled his efforts, for it had now become a question of speed. If they could reach the shore in advance of their pursuer, there was still some hope of their making their escape, for they could conceal themselves in the woods and finally make their way to the forest of Vésinet.

Roger, summoning up all his energy, resolved to make one great effort, but on overtaking Regina, he perceived that she was nearly fainting with exhaustion. Her face was livid, and she had closed her eyes. The change in her appearance frightened the young officer, who made a frantic effort to seize the gourd which was suspended from her neck.

It was now his turn to come to the aid of the faithful friend who had saved his life only a few moments before; but he must have been less adroit than the young girl, for he had an immense amount of difficulty in getting a few drops of the brandy between her parted lips. He succeeded, however, and once more the stimulant produced its effect.

Regina revived, and again resumed her efforts to reach the shore, but it was very evident that her strength was failing fast and that she would not be able to continue this arduous journey much longer.

Their enemy was all the while steadily advancing, and had gained at least twenty yards upon them during the young girl's partial fainting-fit. His body occupied too little space upon the rope to be that of a Prussian; besides, it was scarcely probable that a heavy soldier would have thus risked his life. The abominable little beggar was alone capable of such a feat, though Roger wondered greatly that a mere child, however malicious he might be, would carry his zeal so far as to thus endanger his life.

These doubts were soon dispelled, however.

A shrill laugh resounded behind him, and a piercing voice cried: "Say! wait a minute, can't you?"

Though the beggar had dropped his doleful whine completely, there could be no mistake. It was certainly he who was crawling along the rope. He had all the suppleness as well as the craftiness of a serpent, and he was advancing rapidly.

"The wretch is gaining upon us!" murmured Roger, perceiving that Regina's movements were becoming more and more difficult.

As he continued his efforts to reach the shore, sustaining and encouraging his nearly exhausted companion, he consoled himself by the thought that Pierre Bourdier must be concealed there on the shore, only a few steps from them; and for an instant he thought of calling him, and was only prevented by an unwillingness to reveal his friend's presence to the Prussians upon the island.

"If we can reach the shore in time to hide from the little scoundrel it will be better to let them believe that we are alone," he thought.

But the distance that separated them from their pursuer was sensibly diminishing, as well as Regina's strength, and Roger began to wonder if it would not be advisable for him to await the young scoundrel's approach.

"I still have strength enough left to wring his neck, and throw him into the Seine," he thought. "The Prussians have ceased firing, and even if there should be a struggle, they will not dare to fire for fear of killing their spy."

While he was thus debating in his own mind, the shrill voice of the young vagabond again broke the stillness of the night.

"You won't wait for me, I see," he yelled; "but I'll overtake you, and kill you, all the same; for I have a pistol that my friend the Prussian loaned me, and it is loaded."

The threat made Roger's blood curdle in his veins. He understood now why the Prussians had stopped firing. They wanted to have the pleasure of seeing their paid assassin murder his compatriots.

The voice rose again louder and even more piercing than before. It was evidently coming nearer.

"I could kill you now, if I wanted to," it said; "but I had rather blow your brains out when I'm within arm's-length of you, as I shall then have the satisfaction of seeing your last grimace and the somersault you will make when you fall into the river!"

Roger ground his teeth in impotent rage.

It was useless to engage in a hopeless struggle. They must reach the shore, and reach it quickly, for the young fiend was gaining upon them with frightful rapidity.

Regina now seemed almost unable to sustain herself upon the rope, and with each movement her features contracted and her mouth opened convulsively, but the shore was now only about twenty yards from them.

"There are six bullets in my pistol!" yelled the *gamin*.
"The first is for you, and the second is for the girl."

"She can not hear what he says, fortunately," thought the lieutenant.

"I can see you now! I can see you, and I know you," continued the discordant voice. "It's of no use for you to make a fuss. You're goners, both of you!"

Regina was evidently struggling against the nervous prostration that had seized her. She still dragged herself along, but only by fits and starts, and Roger trembled lest the rope should escape from her rigid hands. They had made some progress, and the shore now rose before them dark and silent.

"Bourdier!" called Roger, in a smothered voice.

He felt that Regina's life depended upon the next few minutes, and that the messenger might be of great assistance to him in saving her.

"Yes; sing, old fellow!" yelled the frightful voice.
"My pistol will play the accompaniment."

Roger turned and distinctly saw the beggar raise his arm. At the same time he heard the sharp click of a revolver.

This time Roger thought that all was over, and fervently prayed that the first bullet might be for him.

"Then I at least shall be spared the anguish of seeing her die!" he muttered.

The beggar had kept his word, for a sharp report followed, and a bullet whistled through the air about two inches above the lieutenant's head.

"I am still too far off, it seems," shouted the would-be assassin, "but never mind, I shall lose nothing by waiting." Roger knew that the young wretch was rapidly approaching by the oscillations of the rope. He glanced behind him and saw that the distance that separated them had decreased considerably, but at the same time he perceived that Regina seemed to have suddenly regained her strength, and was now making considerable progress.

The shore was not more than five or six yards from her now. One more effort, and she might succeed in reaching it.

Roger heard a malevolent hiss behind him, accompanied by the dread click of a revolver. For an instant he was strongly tempted to let go his hold upon the rope, for the shore was now so near that there was a possibility of reaching it, and great as was the danger of a fall into the icy and turbulent waters, it seemed better than this waiting for the young fiend's bullet to put an end to his existence.

"Ah!" cried the little monster, who was now not more than three yards from him, "I have you now. I sha'n't miss you this time."

"Help, Bourdier, help!" cried the lieutenant, involuntarily, as if sure that the messenger was there on the shore within reach of his voice.

The words had scarcely left his lips when he felt the rope give way, and before he had time to understand what had happened, he was precipitated into the water. At first it seemed to him that he must be dead, and during the few seconds that elapsed before he rose to the surface, he really thought that the boy's bullet had hit him. When his head at last emerged from the water, and he was able to breathe again, he heard at the same time a horrible yell and a voice calling him by name.

The voice was that of Pierre Bourdier.

"Don't let go the rope!" he cried.

Roger now perceived, for the first time, that he had re-

tained his hold upon the rope when he fell, and that Bourdier was holding fast to one end of it, even while he knelt upon the shore with his arms outstretched toward Regina, who was almost within his reach.

Roger understood the situation now. Bourdier, who had been watching them from his hiding-place in the bushes on the river bank, had decided to cut the rope when he perceived the imminence of his friend's danger, but he had at the same time taken the precaution not to let go the end of it, and in his stalwart hands the bit of rope became a sure means of salvation.

It had already proved so for Regina, who had reached the shore, and was now lying exhausted on the bank.

Roger, who had fallen into the river a little further from the shore, had more of a journey to make; but seeing the girl out of danger, and the messenger standing ready to save him in his turn, he recovered his energy, and clutching the rope which Pierre Bourdier had hastily tied around the trunk of a tree as soon as the rescue of Regina was effected, he began to pull himself toward the shore, and after a minute or two of terrible effort and cruel suffering, for more than one block of floating ice tore his fingers and disfigured his face, he had the unspeakable satisfaction of gaining a foothold on dry land.

"Thanks, Pierre," he exclaimed, sinking down exhausted by the side of the young girl.

"It isn't worth speaking of," replied the messenger, quietly, "but let us be off. This is no time for chat." •

A frightful cry suddenly resounded in Roger's ears.

"Help! help! I'm drowning!" cried a despairing voice.

"It is the beggar!" the lieutenant exclaimed, springing to his feet.

It was, indeed, he. The young scoundrel had not let go his hold on the rope when he fell into the river with those he was trying to murder; and now that the rope had been fastened around a tree, he was plunging to it with all the

energy of despair, and making frantic efforts to reach the shore.

"Wait and I'll assist you a little," muttered Bourdier, stooping to untie the knot he had tied around the trunk of the tree.

Roger seized him by the arm.

"Spare the wretch!" he faltered.

"That monster!" exclaimed Bourdier, "never! I shall never cease to regret that I spared his life in the forest."

"Have mercy, my kind gentlemen!" shrieked the boy. "Oh, do not let me die!"

"But I shall have to do it if only to prevent him from bringing the bullets of the Prussians down upon us with his cries."

"You see they have stopped firing entirely," said Roger. "They think we are all drowned, and we can certainly spare the little wretch with perfect safety now."

"You are mad!" exclaimed Bourdier.

"Forgive me, my kind gentlemen, forgive me," said the voice. "I will do nothing more to injure you! I was so poor, and they promised me money!"

He had been steadily advancing, and was now only a few yards from the shore.

"Spare his life," pleaded Roger. "God has mercifully preserved us, and I should like to do a kind deed."

"But don't you understand that if we should draw him out of the river he will only dog our footsteps and betray us again?"

"We can tie him."

"Yes, as I did in the forest, to have him upon our track again in an hour. Ah! lieutenant, if you think we have nothing more to do you are very much mistaken. Why, this is nothing in comparison with the rest. We have about two leagues to travel through the Prussian lines and the Seine to cross again."

"Mercy!" shrieked the beggar. "Mercy!"

"His cries rend my heart," said Roger, "and it seems to me it would bring misfortune upon us if we should let him die."

"I will serve you faithfully," cried the little wretch. "I will serve you as faithfully as I served the Prussians. I know all the roads and know where all their posts are—see if I don't. I will guide you anywhere—to Paris, if you like."

"Did you hear that?" asked the lieutenant.

"Yes, I see that the little wretch is setting another trap for us," growled Bourdier.

"I can't stand here and see him die like that," exclaimed Roger. "One can hardly fail to tell the truth when one is at the point of death, and I am going—"

"To do what?" demanded the messenger, brusquely, seizing Roger by the arm.

"To offer him a hand," cried the lieutenant, making a rush for the river, and before the messenger had time to stop him he was leaning over the bank in the hope of saving the little wretch who was now struggling among the blocks of floating ice close to the shore.

"Help! my good sir, help! I can hold out no longer. My strength is failing!"

"Give me your hand," cried Roger, throwing himself upon his knees.

"I can't—I'm too far off!" cried the boy.

The officer leaned as far as possible over the water and stretched out his arm.

Almost instantly the fingers of the beggar lad clutched the sleeve of the lieutenant's blouse.

"I have you at last!" cried the wretch. "I shall not die alone—"

And he burst into a fiendish laugh.

Roger would not have had any difficulty in freeing himself from the beggar's grasp if he had been differently situated, but when the young scoundrel so treacherously

seized him, the kind-hearted officer was kneeling upon the river bank with his body projecting over the water; and both arms extended, so the shock made him lose his equilibrium and he fell face foremost into the water.

He had hardly done so, when the boy seized him around the neck with his right hand, while he clung tenaciously to the rope with his left. He probably calculated that he would be able to keep Roger's head under the water in this way and save himself with the aid of the rope after he had drowned his enemy.

Pierre Bourdier sprung to the assistance of his imprudent companion, but quick as he was, Regina was there before him, and had already seized the lieutenant by the blouse when the messenger reached him.

In spite of his strength and ready wit, Pierre Bourdier was terribly perplexed. Roger's head was still partially under water, and he had all he could do to keep himself from being dragged into the river, so if the struggle proved a long one, he would certainly be drowned before the vagabond's strength was exhausted.

The messenger understood this so perfectly that he picked up a staff that had been left there by some Prussian soldier, and held it out to the boy.

"Come, boy, let go the rope, and come ashore. No one will harm you," he said, persuasively.

"No, no!" yelled the young fiend. "I don't believe you. You would kill me, and I don't intend to die alone."

"Die, then, viper!" said Bourdier, dropping the stick, and springing back. A new idea had just occurred to him.

"Ah, ha! I've got them both now!" yelled the little fiend. "They'll be drowned, both of them! Do you understand. I—"

But the little monster did not have time to finish the sentence. The rope to which he was clinging with his left

hand had just yielded to the force of the current, and overtaken by this sudden mishap, the vagabond endeavored in vain to sustain himself by his hold on Roger's collar; but it was torn from his grasp by a big wave that swept him away upon its breast. In another second he had disappeared in the darkness, and his last cry of rage was smothered by a huge block of ice that settled down upon him like the stone that covers a grave.

Roger, freed from his grasp, managed to regain his footing just as his breath was beginning to fail him, and once again he owed his life to the presence of mind of the brave messenger who had so opportunely untied the rope.

"Well, comrade, I hope you are cured of your misplaced generosity now," remarked Bourdier.

"Oh, that cry! I hear it yet!" murmured the lieutenant.

"It was the savage yell of a wild beast," replied the messenger, brusquely, "and I'm glad I have been able to rid the country of him."

"Who would have supposed that a mere child would be guilty of such malevolence? And he was a Frenchman, too."

"Yes, of a type not uncommon since the beginning of our trouble," muttered Bourdier; "but it is useless to speak of that now. Have you quite recovered, comrade? Take another swallow of brandy, and then we must try to get away from here. It is not a safe place by any means."

"No, and I wonder that the Prussians upon the island have not fired at us before now."

"Oh! we had to contend with the greatest drunkards in the Pomeranian army, fortunately for us; and I knew they would not give us much trouble, for Father Sarrazin promised to give them plenty of his home-made wine. It was that little scoundrel who urged the sentinel to send those bullets after us. By this time the Prussian has re-

turned to his den, and his comrades think we are all at the bottom of the Seine."

Pierre was now climbing the rather steep bluff that overlooks the river, closely followed by his friends.

"I am really afraid of but one thing," he continued. "That is that the sound of the shot has been heard at all the posts and by all the sentinels on this side of the river," remarked Bourdier, after they had walked on in silence for some time.

"Where are we?" inquired Roger, glancing around him.

"On the plain of Argenteuil, about a league and a half from the first line of French outposts. That light you see over there, on our right, is Sartrouville, and a little further on, that black mass, beside a fire which must be that of a Prussian bivouac, is the village of Houilles. Both these places are crowded with Germans, and are consequently to be avoided. On the hills to the left, in the vicinity of Cormeille, Franconville and Sannois, it is even worse, besides, they are entirely out of our route. There is nothing for us to do consequently but go straight on."

"What! through these fields where there is not so much as a bush to conceal us?"

"And where we shall be less likely to meet any Prussians for that very reason. They guard the forests and villages with jealous care, but don't trouble themselves much about the plains. It is the road to Pontoise that we had better take, I think, though it is by no means certain that we shall not encounter some of their scouts."

"But where are we going to recross the river?"

"At the bridge at Bezons," replied Bourdier, tranquilly.

"Why, that would be madness! The Prussians occupy that village in force, and I have reason to know that it is one of the best guarded points on their line."

"Yes, but as you are aware of this fact, you must also know that our sharpshooters line the right bank of the river. Colombes, Bois-Colombes, and Nanterre are filled

with our troops; and in the hamlet called Petit Nanterre, at one end of the bridge, there is a detachment of sharpshooters who will receive us with open arms."

"But you certainly can not hope that the enemy will allow us to cross the bridge?"

"Not the bridge, but the Seine, perhaps."

"But how? There are no boats, and we shall not find a ferry-rope stretched for our convenience there as here."

"That is true; besides, one doesn't walk a tight-rope twice the same night unless one is a Blondin," replied Bourdier, laughing. "But it will take us three hours to reach Bezou, and I am almost sure that we can cross the river on the ice by that time."

"But what if the river should not be frozen?" inquired Roger, after a moment's silence.

"But it will be."

After this display of confidence and audacity Roger would have blushed to offer any further objections, so there was nothing to do but march on, and this he proceeded to do without another word, while as for Regina, here on the edge of this gloomy plain that she was to traverse, surrounded by the enemy, the young girl was the same as she had been in the forest and upon the river, calm, grave, and resolute.

"We must start now," said Pierre Bourdier, curtly, "and as we have no time to waste in idle talk, so let us decide upon our plans once for all."

"I am listening," replied Roger.

"In the first place," continued the messenger, "it is settled that I am to go first for several reasons; the chief of which is that I know the road."

"Yes; but you are also resolved to take the position of greatest danger, and I am very grateful to you."

"Why should I not be anxious to save you from an enemy's bullet if possible? My life is certainly less valuable than that of a French officer, and I would rather die a

dozen times than see a hair of that brave young girl's head harmed."

"I thank you for her," said the lieutenant, extending a hand that the messenger pressed cordially, "but you forget about your dispatches."

"I think I had better intrust a copy of them to you," replied Bourdier, taking the book of cigarette paper from his pocket. "You must roll the paper up and fill it with tobacco, as I did, in case of any trouble."

"I certainly have not forgotten, but—"

"No buts, comrade. It is a favor I ask of you, and you must not refuse it. More than that, you must promise me, upon your word of honor, to do exactly what I tell you."

"I promise."

"Very well, you must promise me, too, that in case I am killed or captured you will not trouble yourself about me, but try to make your own escape with this child."

Roger felt strongly tempted to retract his promise, but he knew that the heroic messenger would not consent, so he hung his head in silence.

"Even if you should see me fall only a dozen yards from you—even if I should be guilty of the weakness of calling you, you are to flee, and not look behind you to see what the Prussians have done with me."

There was a long silence.

"It is for the sake of France that I make this request," continued Bourdier, "for if any misfortune should befall me it will be our only chance of saving the dispatch."

"So be it, then," murmured the officer.

"I shall rely upon your promise, and now I have only one more suggestion to make to you. Follow me at a distance of eight or ten yards, more or less, according as the night is more or less clear, but in such a way as never to lose sight of me. Do exactly what you see me do. Whether I pause, hasten on, stretch myself out upon the ground, or

creep along on my hands and knees, imitate my every movement exactly and instantly."

"Very well."

"As for the young girl, you are to take charge of her, and I shall not make any further attempt to explain matters to her, for I begin to think that she hears with her eyes."

"She understands all you say, I am sure," declared Roger.

"Then forward march!" said Pierre Bourdier, almost gayly.

And suiting the action to the word he crossed the path and started across the large barren field that bordered it upon one side.

The Prussians had undoubtedly been there, for here and there were half completed trenches and earthworks. This northern soldiery had destroyed every trace of vegetation in its track as completely as an army of locusts. Traces of the invasion were apparent on every hand, and on seeing this plain, which had formerly been cultivated with as much care as a garden, one would have supposed himself in the wilds of Brittany.

After a tramp of about three quarters of an hour, rendered extremely wearisome by the necessity of maintaining a stooping posture most of the time, the fugitives beheld in front of them a long elevation which, seen from a distance, resembled the front of a line of fortifications.

Roger felt satisfied that this must be the Pontoise road mentioned by the messenger, and knowing that this was one of the most dangerous points of their nocturnal expedition, he resolved to exercise still greater caution.

He soon saw Pierre Bourdier pause several seconds, then, bending almost double, creep along with a cat-like step to the foot of the ridge that formed the road. On arriving there he laid down flat upon his stomach and began to climb the slope with infinite caution. Roger and the young

girl, who both regulated their movements by his, reached the foot of the slope just as Bourdier reached the summit. After remaining stationary there a second or two they saw him disappear from sight without rising to his feet, but not until he had addressed a warning gesture to them.

Regina and Roger followed him, side by side, up the slope until they reached a broad macadamized road which extended toward the right as far as the eye could reach; but only about a hundred yards to the left of the spot upon which they were lying there was an obstruction across its entire breadth. The lieutenant did not perceive the nature of this obstruction at first, but on looking at it more closely he became satisfied that it was an abatis of trees.

Soon the sound of measured footsteps struck his ear.

There was not the slightest doubt now.

A most unfortunate chance had led the fugitives to within a few yards of a Prussian barricade, and the sound heard by Roger was made by the boot-heels of the sentinel who was pacing to and fro behind it.

The lieutenant saw no sign of Pierre Bourdier. He had vanished from sight like a phantom.

The situation was a critical one.

To cross a road only about one hundred yards from an armed sentinel, without protection of any kind, was certainly a hazardous undertaking, especially as it was not dark enough for the fugitives to pass unnoticed.

The lieutenant knew, by experience, that the Prussians had excellent eyesight, and that their vigilance was untiring, still Pierre Bourdier had succeeded in crossing safely, and recollecting his instructions, Roger said to himself:

"I promised to imitate all his movements, and as I have received my orders I must not depart from them."

The lieutenant touched Regina's arm to put her on her guard, and then, without any further delay, essayed to make the dangerous crossing. He began very slowly and cautiously, dragging himself along on his hands and knees,

and taking care to place himself on the left-hand side of his companion, in order that he might serve as a shield for her in case of an attack.

The measured steps of the sentinel continued to resound through the stillness of the night.

"So long as he doesn't stop we have nothing to fear," thought Roger, "for that will be a pretty sure sign that he has not seen us."

The road was very broad, and when he reached the middle of it Roger perceived that the barricade was nearer than he had at first supposed, for he could distinctly hear the sentinel whistling a Tyrolean air. When he had dragged himself painfully along a few steps further he could even distinguish the sound of several voices. They were talking at their post, a pretty conclusive proof that the Prussians suspected nothing.

If they had imagined that any Frenchmen were in such close proximity to them they certainly would not have been chatting tranquilly behind the barricade.

The fugitives were now near enough to the other side of the road to see that the slope on that side was as steep as that they had just climbed.

They had only three or four yards more to traverse to reach the inclined plane, which would effectually conceal them from the enemy, when Roger noticed that the sound of the sentinel's footsteps had suddenly ceased.

He had evidently paused in his promenade.

The fugitives hastened their movements, in order to reach the protecting slope more quickly, and the lieutenant had need of all his presence of mind to maneuver in such a way as not to attract the attention of the Prussians.

"*Werda?*"

This sonorous cry suddenly resounded from behind the barricade, and Roger's heart sunk like lead.

The sentinel had evidently noticed something moving across the road, and was preparing to fire.

The bullet might come at any instant, and it was not advisable to wait for it, so Roger hastened on as rapidly as one can hasten when one is dragging himself along upon his hands and knees—and Regina kept pace with him.

But even in the brief interval allowed him for thought it occurred to him that this movement, rapid as it was, would not perhaps save him, for it was more than probable that the disappearance of the object noticed by the sentinel would not satisfy their curiosity, but that they would probably emerge from their place of ambush to ascertain what it was. This by no means reassuring idea had but just occurred to him, however, when he heard a dog bark loudly and repeatedly only a few yards from him.

Stifled laughter was the only response to this unexpected signal, and in the fragmentary remarks that reached Roger's ear he fancied he could distinguish the word hound. He was already on the top of the slope, and there was now nothing left for him to do, but allow himself to slide down the incline, all the while congratulating himself upon this most opportune presence of one of the canine race.

To his profound astonishment he landed in Pierre Bourdier's arms.

"What! you are here?" he whispered.

"I waited for you, for I suspected that you would need me, and I was not mistaken. That wasn't a bad imitation I gave you just now, was it?"

"What? That dog—"

"Was your humble servant. I'm a good hand at it, and this isn't the first time I've deceived the Prussians by this trick."

"But what are we to do now?" inquired Roger.

"Wait here a minute or two, just to take breath, and then resume our journey."

"And you still hope to reach Paris in safety?"

"Hope it! Why, I am almost sure of it now. It will take us only about half an hour to get to Bezons now."

"But that is the most difficult part of the whole journey, it seems to me. The village is certainly occupied by the Prussians, and judging from what we have just seen, it will be a difficult matter to pass it."

"Don't worry. I am familiar with the locality, and I know a path that will take us to the river bank without any Prussian suspecting that there is such a thing as a Frenchman in the neighborhood."

"If that was all I had to trouble me," added Bourdier, with a sigh, "I should feel tolerably sure of taking supper with our sharpshooters at Petit Nanterre, two hours from now, but—"

"But what?" repeated Roger, anxiously.

"But there is something else."

"What?"

"The Seine, that came so near proving fatal to us when we crossed it before. Is it frozen over now, or is it not? that is the question. The wind is still blowing from the north, and the thermometer has certainly fallen several degrees since we began our journey, so it would certainly be very strange if a river as full of ice as the Seine is now had not frozen over by this time."

"Heaven grant it!" sighed Roger.

"In any case there is nothing left for us to do but go on," continued the messenger, rising, "and we will resume our line of march in the same order as before."

Roger and the young girl followed him, and after a rapid walk of half an hour they saw him pause and motion them to join him.

"The Seine lies there before us," he whispered.

The fate of the fugitives was about to be decided.

CHAPTER XVII.

FROM the spot where Pierre Bourdier had paused the houses of Bezons were distinctly visible; and the Prussians who occupied this village, which was one of considerable importance on account of its close proximity to the French outposts, took no trouble to conceal their presence.

Lights shone from the windows of several houses, and the reflection of an immense camp-fire reddened the sky. It was very evident that the enemy considered themselves secure from any attack on the side next the plain, and reserved their precautions for that portion of the village bordering on the Seine.

There, the sharpshooters of the two hostile nations were separated only by the width of the stream, so the houses near the bridge remained shrouded in darkness, and the silence was broken only by the shots occasionally exchanged between the sentinels stationed upon the banks.

Roger was not reassured by the appearance of things, and though he racked his brain to the uttermost he could not imagine how his guide would manage to pass through this fortified village swarming with Prussians.

A clump of trees stood a short distance from the spot that Bourdier had selected for his first halt, and at the foot of this semicircle of ancient elms Roger could dimly distinguish a mass of light gray masonry.

"There it is," whispered the messenger.

"What?"

"Our road."

The lieutenant did not understand him in the least. His friend called it a road, but he saw nothing save a wall. Nevertheless he had become accustomed to yielding to Pierre Bourdier's rather peremptory decisions, and he had such

implicit faith in the accuracy of his judgment that he made no comment whatever.

"You will soon see that I did not deceive you when I told you that we should pass under the very noses of the Prussians without their having the slightest suspicion of the fact. Let us move on, but very cautiously, for the scoundrels are not far off."

And he resumed his journey, closely followed by his two protégés.

The little party proceeded straight toward the clump of trees; but to reach it they were obliged to ascend a knoll dotted here and there with clumps of shrubbery and piles of stones. Bourdier bent himself nearly double in passing through all the open spaces, and skillfully availed himself of every bush and shrub that would serve as a sort of screen; and it is needless to say that his movements were scrupulously imitated by the lieutenant and the young girl.

They finally reached the edge of a sort of basin much longer than it was broad, at the further end of which rose the wall which the fugitives had perceived in the distance.

It was not difficult to see the intended use of this basin, dug by the hand of man, and bordered with a row of broad flat stones; but whether it was intended for a reservoir or lavatory it was evidently not in use at that time, for it was covered with a sheet of ice.

"That is a good omen," whispered the lieutenant to Pierre Bourdier, who happened to be standing beside him, for two or three large stones thrown by the Prussians had made no impression upon it, but could be seen lying upon its surface.

"The Seine doesn't freeze over as easily as a pond," replied the messenger, laconically; "but we shall soon know what to think now."

As Bourdier spoke he stepped upon the ice and motioned Roger to follow him. These mute instructions were instantly obeyed by the lieutenant and Regina, who followed

their guide closely and silently across the frozen pond. When they reached the wall at the further end of it Bourdier paused and pointed to an opening in the masonry.

"Do you understand now?" he asked, with a low chuckle.

"I can't say that I do."

"Ah, well, I'll explain, then. The opening you see here is the mouth of a subterranean canal that serves as an outlet when the water rises too high in the basin. This passage, which seems to have been made expressly for our convenience, leads straight to the river, and ends at the first arch of the bridge."

"And you feel sure that it is neither walled up nor guarded?"

"Perfectly sure. Father Sarrazin explored it day before yesterday, and satisfied himself fully on that point."

"My dear comrade, we shall certainly owe our lives to you."

"Wait until we reach Paris before you say that."

"We shall be there to-morrow, I am sure."

"We shall be better able to say when we reach the mouth of the canal," replied Pierre Bourdier, stooping in order to enter the opening. "When I promised you a little while ago that you should pass safely under the very noses of the Prussians, I ought to have said under their very feet," he added.

Roger was not even obliged to beckon to Regina. She had already followed their guide into the dark passage-way. The canal was neither very high nor very broad, but it presented no serious obstacles; the only serious inconvenience to travelers who had become tolerably accustomed to crawling along on their hands and knees was the lack of air that became especially noticeable in the middle of the passage-way, and not more than a quarter of an hour had passed when Roger, who brought up the rear, perceived a faint light that seemed to be drawing nearer and nearer.

Ten minutes afterward they reached the mouth of the canal.

"We are under the first arch of the bridge," whispered Bourdier, "and I begin to think that all will be well. See!" he added, pointing to the river.

The river, which extended to within about three feet of them, was covered with ice, but whether this ice was sufficiently strong to bear their weight was a question that could only be settled by trying.

"The bridge has five arches, of which the middle one only has been destroyed. We shall have no difficulty until we reach that, for as long as we keep under the bridge we have nothing to fear from the Prussians."

"But you think we shall succeed in getting safely across?" asked Roger, who could not help trembling for Regina whenever they found themselves confronted by any new peril.

"I am utterly unable to say," replied the messenger; "but this much is certain, it is too late to recoil now."

And he stepped cautiously upon the ice.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE bridge at Bezons was the scene of continual conflict during the entire siege of Paris, though no great battle or important engagement ever took place there, for the French troops never made any attempt to force a passage across the Seine at this point, there being no special strategic advantage to be derived from its occupancy.

The Prussians, too, having resolved to reduce the capital by starvation, had no desire to incur any risk of serious loss here or elsewhere, and so confined themselves to guarding the river without making any attempt to cross it.

The French sharpshooters occupied a long line of intrenchments on the summit of the ridge that overlooks the stream at this point and directly opposite the Prussians,

who were posted in the houses and upon the quay on the right bank of the river, and both sides kept up an almost incessant fire, probably to keep themselves in practice, for they rarely killed any one.

The vigor with which this fusillade was maintained depended greatly upon the character of the troops that guarded this point, the Bavarians being rather peaceably inclined, while the Pomeranians never missed an opportunity to get a shot at any helmet or bayonet that showed itself.

When Bourdier left Paris the Bavarians were occupying Bezons; and it is not unlikely that he believed the difficulties of their present undertaking would be mitigated by the rather peaceable disposition of the men guarding the post; but the garrison had been changed during his absence, and the fusillade during the latter part of the month of December was much more brisk and spirited than ever before.

A sharpshooter who was a great favorite with his companions had been shot through the head while he was quietly superintending the manufacture of a pot of soup in the trenches. On the other hand, some Pomeranians who ventured out upon the river in a boat, in order to have a little music, had been fired at by the French sharpshooters, and after this interchange of hostilities both sides lived in a state of incessant warfare.

The little party that had just ventured out upon the ice soon discovered that this was by no means a favorable moment for crossing the Seine unseen, for they had scarcely begun to traverse the space under the first arch when a shot was fired from the left bank, and then another, and in response to these came three quick shots from the opposite shore.

“If we should remain here two hours our situation would undergo no change for the better, for they will keep this up all night; and I fear the ice will not last long, as the weather is already beginning to moderate considerably. I think we had better risk it here and now.”

Pierre Bourdier said this in his most decided tones.

• “I think so too,” replied the lieutenant. -

“Then there is nothing for us to do but go straight ahead; but this time I think that each of us had better cross separately, instead of proceeding in line as we did before.”

“You are right. A solitary individual will attract less attention than a party.”

“Exactly; but be careful to walk directly under the middle of the bridge, as there the shadow is almost sure to effectually screen you from observation, and in rounding the piers that support the arches stoop and keep as close to the masonry as possible, so it will be difficult to distinguish you from it.”

“That will be the most dangerous part of the trip.”

“No, not so dangerous as crossing the open space where the middle arch formerly stood. There we shall be exposed upon all sides; and the only thing we can do is to make a rush for the first arch on the opposite shore.”

“That won’t be such a very difficult matter if the ice is strong enough to hold us.”

“I am by no means sure that it is; but I see no other way out of the difficulty. Besides, if we succeed in reaching the further end of the second arch unobserved—as I hope we shall—we can pause there a moment to find out the real state of affairs and hold a last council of war. And now let us start, for a thaw is not far off.”

“Yes, let us start,” repeated Roger, “and may Heaven protect us!”

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The space under the first arch was traversed without the slightest difficulty, for it was very dark under this protecting roof, and the positions occupied by the sharpshooters on both sides of the river were such as to make it very difficult for them to see what was going on under this arch.

On reaching the first massive pier the little party divided, Pierre Bourdier going to the left and Roger to the right. Regina very naturally followed her friend, who

threw himself flat upon the ice and crawled cautiously around the massive abutment to the space under the second arch.

It was the work of only a few seconds, and the maneuver proved eminently successful, for the lieutenant had scarcely risen to his feet again when he saw Bourdier round the other end of the pier, and in another second or two Regina stood beside them safe and sound.

Three minutes more and the space between the first and second piers was safely traversed; but their position now was much less enviable from the fact that it was not impossible for the guards stationed upon the right bank to see under the arch, though by keeping perfectly still the fugitives might escape observation.

The critical moment soon came, however.

Beyond this place of shelter lay the vacant space made by the destruction of the center arch; but there was some consolation in knowing that France lay on the other side of it, and that the arches on the left bank of the stream once reached, the fugitives had only to reveal their identity.

"We must make the venture, and at once, for I can see that the ice is becoming less firm already," whispered Bourdier.

"And it will be even less strong in the middle of the river," replied Roger.

"That remains to be seen. Come with me, and let us reconnoiter a little," responded Bourdier, dragging his companion to the end of the pier.

"Now let us get down on our knees and take a look at the other side," he remarked.

To their unspeakable relief they found that the channel, too, was frozen over, though the surface of the ice was exceedingly uneven, owing to the fact that the huge blocks of floating ice had been piled one above the other by the force of the current.

All was quiet, however. The fusillade had stopped for a

time, and the profound silence was broken only by a dull and monotonous sound that seemed to come from somewhere above their heads.

"It is the Prussian sentinel on guard at the end of the bridge beating his arms to keep himself warm," whispered Bourdier.

"The deuce! he's in a very bad place for us."

"And for himself, too," replied Bourdier, crawling back under the protecting shelter of the arch; and they had scarcely risen to their feet when a shot was fired from the bank on which the French were encamped and Roger heard a stifled cry, followed by the sound of a heavy fall overhead.

"I didn't expect my words to come true so soon," remarked the messenger.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Why, one of our men who must have been watching for him has at last succeeded in picking him off. It's a good thing for us, for he might have caused us no end of trouble, not by firing at us—he was not in a good place for that—but by shouting to the other Prussians. I really begin to think that we shall breakfast in Paris to-morrow, after all."

Regina had approached them. She was calm and even smiling, and the terrible risk they were about to run seemed to have no terrors for her.

"This time we must all take flight together, like a flock of birds," continued Bourdier. "Are you ready?"

"Yes," replied Roger.

"Forward, then!"

Roger traversed half the distance safely, but on reaching the middle of the stream he stumbled over a block of ice, and narrowly escaped falling. It took him only a second to regain his equilibrium, but when he did, he perceived that Regina was considerably in advance of him, and that she had directed her course toward the right. It was evi-

dent that she intended to round the side of the pier by thest down the river.

His first impulse was to follow her, but the thought that it would be better to separate flashed across his mind, and he turned to the left.

With a few hurried bounds the open space was traversed. Bourdier crossed a little further to the left and a few feet behind him, and the protecting shadow of the pier was nearly reached, when the young lieutenant saw the barrel of a musket gleam from under the arch.

The sensation he experienced, however, was that of surprise rather than fear. He was prepared for almost anything, in fact, except finding an enemy lurking under the arch toward which he was so frantically rushing.

The first idea that occurred to him was to pause instantly; the second was to recoil; but he had no time to analyze his impressions, for as he hastily turned he slipped and fell flat upon the ice. Unfortunately he had fallen a little above the pier, and consequently within range of the rifle leveled upon him. As he fell, too, he heard this by no means reassuring order, uttered a few yards from him:

“Fire, and be sure not to miss him!”

Roger closed his eyes and awaited death, though not without a terrible sinking of heart at the thought that he was about to perish by the hand of a compatriot, but almost simultaneously with the words uttered above, a voice that seemed to proceed from the other end of the pier cried hastily:

“Don’t fire! It is a Frenchman!”

The man under the arch must have heard the exclamation and attached some importance to it, for instead of firing, as he had at first intended, he dropped his gun. It would be difficult to describe all that passed through the lieutenant’s mind during the next few seconds, which seemed longer than centuries.

He had supposed himself lost, but he was saved, or at

least ~~he~~ was still living, and, stranger than all the rest, it seemed to him that the voice which had uttered this timely warning was the voice of a woman.

"If you are a friend, tell who you are."

These words uttered in subdued tones, only a few feet from him, quickly awoke him to a realizing sense of the situation, and scrambling to his feet with all possible speed, he replied:

"Yes, yes; I am a Frenchman."

As he spoke he took a step forward.

"The countersign, quick! the countersign! Give me the countersign, or I'll blow your brains out," cried the man with the gun, in a tone that would have convinced any one of his determination to fire if the response did not prove satisfactory.

Roger was, of course, unable to comply with this order, but fortunately he had the presence of mind to promptly reply:

"I am the bearer of dispatches from the Army of the Loire."

This announcement, however, would not perhaps have sufficed to protect him from the weapon that was again leveled upon him, but almost at the same instant, two or three bullets fired from the Prussian side made the ice fly around him, and this constituted a pretty satisfactory proof of the truth of his assertion, for the Germans certainly would not have fired at one of their own men; so, instead of firing or uttering any further threats, the sharpshooter under the arch quietly said:

"Come under here, then, and let us see who you are."

Roger needed no urging, though he was not unprepared for the very inhospitable reception that awaited him. He had scarcely reached the pier, however, when a pair of stalwart hands seized him by the collar, and another man stepped up behind him and pinioned his arms.

"Hold him tight," said the person who seemed to be in command of the party.

"Don't be afraid, he can't move," replied his captors.

"Now who are you?" demanded the officer, curtly.

"A lieutenant in the Mobiles," said Roger, who had recovered his presence of mind, "captured at Billancourt on the 17th of October, escaped day before yesterday from the enemy's hospital at Saint Germain, and the bearer of a letter addressed to the Governor of Paris."

This information was uttered in accents so clear and firm that it made an evident impression on the commander.

"Very well. We will see about all this presently in the trenches," he said, hastily.

"But I am not alone," said Roger, who had forgotten his companions for an instant in the excitement.

"A woman!" exclaimed the leader of the sharpshooters, almost at the same instant, for Regina had suddenly appeared before them.

"Yes; a woman who assisted me in making my escape from Saint Germain," hastily replied the lieutenant.

"And who just saved your life again," remarked one of the sharpshooters; "for if she had not cried out I should certainly have shot you."

"Cried out? Why, that is impossible! She is dumb."

"Dumb!" repeated the leader. "That is strange. Wait, and let me think a moment—"

"But where is my other friend?" interrupted the lieutenant.

"What other friend?"

"A comrade who is also the bearer of dispatches."

What he said was only too true. Pierre Bourdier was indeed missing, and the incidents related above had followed each other in such swift succession that Roger had not been able to see what had become of the messenger.

It seemed to him that he had seen him upon his left a second before his fall, but what had become of him since?

Roger's every faculty was instantly stimulated to the utmost by the thought that the man who had saved his life two or three times was in danger of death.

"Save him, sir, or let me save him!" he cried, making a desperate effort to free himself from his captors.

"But where is he?"

"There, on the ice, exposed to the enemy's fire—wounded, perhaps!"

"There were two of them, sir," said one of the soldiers who were holding the fugitive.

"Then we must see what has become of him," muttered the officer. "Though this is a bad place for us, it shall never be said that I allowed a Frenchman to perish if there was any possibility of saving him."

"Look out, Girard, and see if you can see anything of him."

The soldier obeyed, and after a moment's silence turned his head to say:

"I see him."

"Where? What is he doing? Call him!" exclaimed Roger.

"Silence in the ranks!" said the officer, sternly.

"He has fallen into an air-hole!"

"Is he dead?"

"No; he is trying to get out, but he will find it a very difficult matter, as the ice breaks whenever he rests any weight upon it."

"To say nothing of the fact that he is sure to be shot," added another soldier.

For a well-directed fire was now in progress from the Prussians.

"Quick! don't lose a second!" cried Roger.

"How far is he from the pier?"

"At least twenty yards, and in a fine place to serve as a target for the enemy."

"Then there will soon be one man less in the world."

said the officer, in a tone that admitted of no reply. "Prepare to beat a retreat, boys."

"What! you certainly will not—"

The only response to this despairing cry were these words, which rang in Roger's ears like a death-knell:

"I will not endanger the lives of my soldiers to save a civilian from death."

Roger did not know what to say in reply to this refusal, for it was only too evident that no one could save the unfortunate Bourdier without incurring great risk; but an inspiration occurred to him.

"Major," he said, in a voice that trembled with emotion, "I do not ask you to endanger the lives of your men, but I certainly have a right to dispose of my own."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I will go to his aid alone."

"Where? Out upon the ice?"

"Yes; and I beseech you to allow me to do it."

"Are you so fond of your comrade as all that?"

"Had it not been for him I should have lost my life over and over again since I escaped from Saint Germain."

"You would only be throwing away your own life. This man is lost, and you would not be able to get him here, even if you were fortunate enough to escape the enemy's bullets yourself."

"No matter; I will try! I must try!" cried Roger, once more making a frantic effort to free himself from his captors.

But they had received their instructions, and they would not relax their hold without an order from their commander, who did not seem inclined to give it.

He seemed to be reflecting, and Roger trembled with impatience, remembering that every second lost lessened his friend's chance of escape.

"Upon my word, major," remarked the sharpshooter, who had remained at the corner of the pier to watch, "if

you want to get the fellow out of the scrape you will have to make haste, for he seems to be gradually sinking deeper and deeper into the hole."

"He will have to stay there," replied the officer, with the brusqueness of a man who has just come to a painful but irrevocable decision. "We must be off now, and take these persons with us."

"But that is impossible, sir!" exclaimed Roger. "You certainly will not allow a Frenchman and a bearer of dispatches to perish thus—"

"But you, too, are a bearer of dispatches, you say; and if I allow you to go out there and get killed how will your dispatches reach Paris?"

"I shall give them to you. Here they are," said the lieutenant, drawing a blank book from his pocket.

The officer took it with very natural astonishment, but the offer did not produce the effect Roger had anticipated.

"I must say that all this does not seem very clear to me," replied the officer, "and for that very reason I can not think of releasing you."

"What! you distrust me?"

"Most assuredly I do. You say that you bring a message from one of our armies in the provinces. That is very possible; still, there is nothing to prove that you are not a Prussian spy. Many stranger things happen in these days, and if I should allow you to venture out upon the ice I am by no means sure that you would not take advantage of the opportunity to rejoin your friends, the enemy."

The unfortunate lieutenant bowed his head under this accusation; but, though he lacked courage to vindicate himself, he was determined to make his escape, even if he fell a victim to a French bullet.

The men shouldered their rifles, and the whole party was about to depart, when Regina emerged from the shadow in which she had been standing, and to the officer's intense astonishment, seized him by the arm.

"What the deuce can she want with me?" exclaimed the major, as he allowed the girl to lead him to the end of the pier, where it was not nearly as dark as under the middle of the arch, and where the pale light of the rising moon shone upon the features of the young girl and revealed her lustrous black eyes.

An exclamation of astonishment escaped the officer.

"Why, it is the gypsy girl I met at Rueil!" he exclaimed, leaning forward to scrutinize the girl's features more closely.

Regina nodded, as if to assure him that he was not mistaken.

"Well, this is really incomprehensible!" muttered the officer.

But his surprise increased, for the girl's gestures instantly became more expressive. With one hand she pointed heavenward, and with the other to the unfortunate man who was struggling for life there under his very eyes.

It would have been impossible to express more clearly the assurance that God commanded the soldier to save a compatriot. But the officer saw something more than a divine invocation in the gesture, for, struck by a sudden recollection, he exclaimed:

"The prophecy!"

Regina seized his hand, and pressed it tightly, while her glowing eyes riveted themselves upon those of the officer.

"Yes, I recollect," he stammered, drawing away his hand to pass it across his forehead like a man who is just waking from a dream. "She predicted it—over there in Mouchabeuf's wine-shop. I know—I have not forgotten. I am to be shot before the end of the year—if—if I do not save the life of—"

"In the name of France, major, I beseech you not to let him die!" cried Roger, who was too far off to hear, but who had seen Regina's gestures and the officer's evident hesitation.

He had no idea what was passing between them, as the

scene at Rueil had never been described to him, but his instinct told him that all hope was not lost.

He soon perceived that he was not mistaken.

The major pushed Regina aside, and dashing by his astonished men, he sprung out upon the ice, crying:

“No, no! It shall never be said of me that I, Podensac, allowed a Frenchman to perish under my very eyes!”

All else was forgotten now in watching the thrilling scene before them, for Pierre Bourdier's situation had become really desperate.

He had been so unfortunate as to step into a sort of miniature crevasse, and the weight of his body had gradually separated the blocks of ice which were too fragile to have acquired any great solidity; and he only exhausted his strength in his vain efforts to raise himself, for the ice yielded whenever he rested any weight upon it. In fact, the sharpshooter had not exaggerated when he declared that only the man's head was visible; and yet, the brave messenger had not uttered a cry or an appeal for aid.

Podensac reached him with three or four bounds and offered him a hand.

There was a moment of agonizing suspense, for Roger feared that Bourdier had not sufficient strength left to avail himself of the proffered aid; but he soon saw him slowly emerge from the hole, place one knee upon the ice, and then scramble out.

Both men were fortunate enough to escape the bullets that were falling like hail around them, and in five minutes they were both safe under the protecting shelter of the arch, where Roger impetuously embraced his friend, and warmly thanked Podensac, who again gave orders for immediate departure.

The perilous journey was ended; and Lieutenant de Saint Senier's heart throbbed wildly at the thought of soon seeing Renée again.

“But who could have told the sharpshooters not to kill

me?" he said to himself, gazing thoughtfully at Régina, who was walking quietly along beside him.

CHAPTER XIX.

A two days' journey is sometimes attended with more adventures than would be needed to enliven the history of a trip around the world, for there are times which are especially fertile in startling events.

During the siege of Paris, for example, the adventures that befell a person in an attempt to make his way through the Prussian lines were sometimes more numerous and startling than those of a journey from Marseilles to Japan.

This was certainly the experience of Roger de Saint Senier and Regina, and all the thrilling adventures that had befallen them occurred while two or three comparatively unimportant events were happening to their friends in Paris. On the same night the fugitives were traversing the forest of Saint Germain, Renée de Saint Senier and her aunt left the cottage on the Rue de Laval to take up their abode in Dr. Molinhard's private hospital, and by a strange coincidence, at the very moment that Regina, worn out with fatigue, was sleeping away the morning in the blue room at the mill, Renée, a prisoner at Montmartre, was just sinking into a heavy slumber.

And J. B. Frapillon, her dastardly persecutor, left the editorial rooms of the "Serpenteau" just as Pierre Bourdieu was arousing his two traveling companions to inform them of the necessity of immediate departure.

But J. B. Frapillon, as he wended his way majestically to a neighboring restaurant, accompanied by M. Antoine Pilevert, little suspected that some of the other victims of his machinations were slowly but surely making their way toward Paris. In fact, he had almost forgotten the existence of the young lieutenant captured by the Prussians during the month of October, and he also supposed himself

well rid of the deaf and dumb girl Mouchabeuf had so cleverly disposed of to Corporal Tichdorf a few days afterward.

J. B. Frapillon was an eminently practical man, and when he supposed any troublesome persons safely out of his way he troubled himself no more about them than a chess-player troubles himself about the captured pieces removed from the board; besides, his mind just now was engrossed with much more important matters, for the critical moment when diplomatists of his stamp are reluctantly compelled to resort to violent measures was fast approaching.

Strongly inclined by nature to employ persuasion rather than coercion, he scrupulously avoided any open violation of the criminal code; and when any such infraction became absolutely necessary, he always confided the execution of it to some subordinate, as in the present instance, when he made his agent, Mouchabeuf, responsible for the abduction and imprisonment of Mlle. de Saint Senier, for nothing would have induced him to run any risk of a compulsory voyage to Cayenne.

But the hour for parleying and for half measures had gone by.

The imprisonment of his victims could not be prolonged indefinitely, and before deciding their fate he must learn something more about the mystery connected with the cottage. This was a mystery that must be solved before he could decide upon his future course, and the present was an excellent opportunity, as his accomplices of both sexes were not only occupied with other matters, but were even ignorant of the ladies' abduction. He had in his pocket the keys of the cottage, taken from poor Renée during the unnatural slumber that had resulted from the opiate administered by his orders, so there was nothing to prevent him from taking the matter into his own hands, and from boldly breaking the articles that punish house-breaking, theft

and murder, for the execution of his plans would compel him to commit at least one of these offenses, and possibly all.

This depended entirely upon what he would find in the deserted cottage.

Now J. B. Frapillon's conscience troubled him very little, but the safety of his own precious self was a matter of immense importance, and for this reason he had resolved to secure the services of a body-guard strong enough to protect him and unscrupulous enough to obey unquestioningly.

Antoine Pilevert possessed these all-important requisites, and Frapillon, blessing the lucky fate that had brought them together in the office of the "Serpenteau," instantly resolved to secure the acrobat's good will by one of those tempting invitations to which Pilevert could never turn a deaf ear.

A good dinner, accompanied with plenty of wine, would attract Rose de Charmière's brother anywhere, and this case proved no exception to the rule.

The restaurant selected by Frapillon was noted for its extensive and well-chosen wine-cellar, and the host had considerable difficulty in preventing his guest from pausing in the bar-room connected with the establishment; but he finally succeeded in dragging him up the staircase leading to the private rooms above.

Though he had excellent eyesight, and prided himself upon his keen powers of perception, the diplomatist of the Rue Cadet had failed to notice that a lad had followed them from the Rue Montorgueil to the door of the restaurant; nor did he perceive that the same unprepossessing young rascal still kept close upon their heels as they made their way through the crowded bar-room.

The room that was placed at the disposal of J. B. Frapillon and his guest was not remarkably elegant in its appointments. The paper that covered the walls would not

have looked out of place in a village inn, the linen was neither dazzling in its whiteness, or very fine in quality, while the glasses were remarkable chiefly for their size and thickness.

Still, it was not necessary to dazzle the eyes of Pilevert, but merely to unloose his tongue and gain his favor, and to do this Frapillon relied chiefly upon a supply of bottles proportionate to the insatiable thirst of his guest, though the other essentials of an excellent repast were not wanting.

"Ah, well, my dear Antoine," remarked the host, in an almost affectionate tone, as the dessert was placed upon the table, "how do you like your new situation?"

"I don't like it at all," was the prompt rejoinder.

"Indeed! Why, you really surprise me. I thought you had a capital place on the staff."

"A capital place, indeed! For a paltry ten francs a day and a dozen glasses of beer I am expected to remain from morning until night in a miserable chicken coop where I can scarcely get my breath, talking to a crowd of fools who overwhelm me with complaints I don't understand a word of. If I could only break their heads for them, it wouldn't matter so much, but—"

"That certainly would be some consolation," interrupted Frapillon; "but I am quite sure that you can have no just grounds of complaint against my friends Valnoir and Taupier."

"Humph! nice fellows they are! Your Valnoir, a conceited fop who puts on no end of airs, though I could knock him down with two fingers of my left hand! and that miserable little hunchback who is always taking me to task for drinking too much. If it wasn't for Catiche—"

"And who is Catiche?"

"Why, Rose, to be sure."

"Can it be that you are speaking of Mme. de Charmière?" inquired Frapillon, feigning intense surprise.

"I certainly have a right to, as she is my sister—yes, my sister, and I must say that for a sister she is already beginning to treat me very shabbily. Ah! if I only had my little Regina! How devoted she was to me—and how kind—not the least bit stuck up."

And overcome with grief at the recollection of the loss he had sustained, the Rampart of Avallon leaned his head upon his hand and heaved a sigh that was very like a groan, little suspecting that he was expressing his regret in the presence of his dear protégée's bitterest persecutor.

"No!" he exclaimed, suddenly, striking the table violently with his clinched fist, "I'll stand it no longer. I've had enough of their office where they keep me cooped up all day, and of their society of the 'Moon with the Teeth,' where they make speeches three hours long without treating to even so much as a glass of beer."

"My dear Antoine, you are going a little too far, it seems to me. These gentlemen are friends of mine, and—"

"Friends!" interrupted the now thoroughly exasperated athlete. "They are no friends of yours, or of mine, I can tell you. Would you like to know what your Valnoir and Taupier said about you only yesterday?"

"No."

"I'm going to tell you, anyhow. They say you have appropriated all the funds of their society, and this evening at their club of water-drinkers, they are first going to call for your report, and then haul you over the coals afterward. It seems they know where the money is, and they intend to take possession of it. I like my wagon a great deal better than their old office, and I'd do anything in the world for the man who would give me back my wagon and my good mare Bradamante."

J. B. Frapillon listened to these incoherent complaints with deep interest, for the revelation the acrobat had just made affected him deeply. All Frapillon lived for was

money, and he had no intention of allowing it to be taken from him.

He thought the matter over as he slowly sipped his last glass of wine, and his plans were made before it was emptied.

"My dear friend," he said, affectionately, "I am truly grieved to learn of your disappointment, though one could hardly expect a man of your spirit and talent to mope forever in an office. I am not rich, whatever people may say to the contrary, but if a couple of thousand francs will set you up in your old business again you shall have the money."

"Truly?"

"Upon my word of honor!"

"Great Jupiter!" exclaimed Pilevert, evidently strongly inclined to throw his arms around Frapillon's neck. "What do you want me to demolish for you? Do you want any one summarily disposed of? You have only to say so."

"Thanks, my friend, thanks! The offer was not made from selfish motives, and I don't want any one killed or even knocked down, but as you seem desirous of doing me a favor, I am going to ask you to keep me company the rest of the evening. We will go first to the meeting of the society."

"So that is all. Very well, the first person that dares to say a word against you will get a black eye, that's all I have to say."

"I hope we shall not be obliged to resort to such violent measures, and that we shall afterward be able to go—"

"Where?"

"Somewhere else," replied Frapillon, laconically. "It is eight o'clock, and we must be off. I'll pay at the desk as I go out."

CHAPTER XX.

THE hall where the "Society of the Moon with the Teeth" held its meetings was on the outer boulevard, in a neighborhood where the society could count many adherents.

These meetings were sometimes public and sometimes private, according as the leading spirits of the association wished to inspire the members with fresh enthusiasm by their eloquence, or merely to discuss the condition of the society in a sort of family conclave. The surest means of overthrowing the government, destroying the capital, and of securing an equal division of property were discussed only in secret session, to which admission could be secured only by giving the password.

J. B. Frapillon was a regular attendant of all the public meetings, and seldom failed to attend the secret sessions.

On leaving the restaurant where he had dined in company with the former acrobat, he was ignorant of the nature of the meeting appointed for that evening, but Plievort's revelations led him to suppose that the session was to be a secret one, so on reaching the hall he was considerably surprised to find quite a crowd assembled in front of the main entrance, and this being the case, both Frapillon and his companion failed to notice the presence of the *gamin* who had followed them from the Rue Montorgueil to the restaurant, and from the restaurant to the meeting of the political club.

The assemblage was large, and extremely interesting on account of its motley character.

Members of the National Guard seemed to form a handsome majority, but women were not wanting. Some must even have been in the habit of spending their evenings here, for they had brought their work with them, like the *tricoteuses* of the Jacobin Club.

The meeting was presided over by Taupier, whose distorted and grotesque form was almost hidden by the two militiamen who acted as his assistants.

On perceiving the hunchback, Pilevert uttered a series of growls that the prudent Frapillon promptly suppressed, in order to avoid attracting the attention of his neighbors, but his ill-humor reasserted itself when he saw the lank form of his former pupil appear upon the platform.

The public did not seem to share his disgust, however, for a flattering murmur greeted the new orator.

"That is the young fellow who explains the justice and necessity of dividing the aristocrats' money," remarked one of the audience.

"Oh, yes, the fellow that talks like a streak of lightning," replied another. "He is right, but he uses so many big words that he puzzles me."

"It is plain enough though that if we do as he says we shall each have an income of six thousand francs."

"Without doing anything?"

"Without lifting a finger. It is the rich who will have to work, then."

"Citizen Alcindor Panaris will now address the meeting," announced Taupier, who took a very evident pride in the exercise of his functions.

Citizen Alcindor balanced himself first upon one long leg and then upon the other, and passed his hand over his long thin hair like a guest who is preparing to enter a ball-room. On hearing his name from the lips of the president he stepped forward with all the grace of which he was capable, and placing one hand on the table, said in his most persuasive voice:

"Fellow citizens!"

But he had scarcely uttered the words when a confused murmur arose at the further end of the hall, and a man was seen endeavoring to force his way through the crowd, while on every side resounded such exclamations as:

"Take care!"

"You're stepping on my toes, citizen."

"Don't crowd so!"

"What does he want, anyhow?"

The person who caused all this commotion seemed to trouble himself very little about the dissatisfaction he was creating and the anathemas lavished upon him in his passage, and finally succeeded, by dint of vigorous pushing and an occasional resort to blows, in reaching the platform, where he whispered a few words in the ear of the president, who seemed to listen to him with quite a show of deference.

The audience evidently expected an explanation, and Taupier soon gave it in these words:

"Citizens," he said, rising, "a member of the National Guard desires to make a very important announcement to you."

"Speak! speak!" resounded from every part of the hall.

"Citizens," began the member of the National Guard to whom Taupier had just yielded the floor, to the very evident dissatisfaction of Alcindor, "Citizens, I have glorious news for you. I come to announce a great victory won by the Army of the Loire—a brilliant victory! The Prussians left thirty thousand men dead upon the field, and fifteen thousand men were taken prisoners. The rest fled, and Frederick Charles was killed!"

With the wild commotion and shouts of joy that followed this startling announcement were mingled such skeptical exclamations as, "Another canard."

"Fifteen thousand prisoners! The same old story."

Frapillon, though naturally incredulous, contented himself with shrugging his shoulders, however, but the acrobat, who was only a lukewarm patriot, muttered:

"What do I care about Frederick Charles? This victory won't give me back my wagon and Bradamante."

President Taupier seemed to share the surprise of the

audience, and now rose to request the bearer of this glorious news for proofs of the accuracy of his statements.

"Citizens," added the new-comer, hastily, "I should fail in my duty toward the people if I omitted to tell you how I heard of this victory won by our brothers-in-arms."

"Yes! yes!"

"Listen! Silence!"

"I was on guard this evening at the Porte d'Asnières, when the bearer of this news presented himself. The pontlevis was lowered by the commandant's order, and the brave courier was conducted to the office of the governor-general, but he had time to give us the particulars before he left."

"Your courier must have come in a balloon then."

This satirical remark only produced a fresh burst of eloquence from the orator, however.

"No, citizens," he exclaimed. "The messenger did not come in a balloon. He had made his way with infinite difficulty through the Prussian lines, and was received with open arms by the Enfants Perdus of the Rue Maubuce, whose leader honors me with his friendship."

This time no unseemly jest marred the exultant chorus that resounded on every side.

Even Erapillon was almost convinced.

Meanwhile the new-comer, highly elated by his success as a public speaker, showed no inclination to leave the platform, and apparently had other revelations to make.

"Go on! go on!" shouted the audience.

"This hero," continued the speaker, "brought back with him an officer in the Garde Mobile, who was wounded and taken prisoner about two months ago—an officer and a young woman about whom there seems to be some mystery, for she did not reply to a single one of the questions that were addressed to her by the citizens at the post."

A vague uneasiness assailed Frapillon, but he said to himself that there could not possibly be any connection be-

tween his former victims and the persons who figured in this highly improbable story.

"What a fool I am!" he thought, shrugging his shoulders. "Saint Senier died in the hospital at Saint Germain, and the deaf and dumb girl is safe in Prussia."

"But, citizens," continued the orator, "important as is the news I bring to you I should not have ventured to ask your attention if I had not a proposal to make to you."

"Go ahead! go ahead!"

"Let's hear it!"

"Hold your tongues, you idiots, if you want the man to explain."

"It is this, citizens. It seems that the Prussians who are besieging us have heard of Frederick Charles's defeat, and are positively panic-stricken, so I have come here, citizens, to propose a sortie in force."

The speaker had hardly uttered these words when an indescribable tumult arose in the crowd.

"Yes, yes, *in force*," shouted the throng, wildly, for five months of disappointment and failure had not lessened the power of those oft-quoted words.

"On to Berlin! On to Berlin!" yelled the *gamin* who had followed Frapillon and his companion into the hall.

"And why not, citizens? Why should we not pursue these upholders of tyranny to their homes? Let us make this sortie to-morrow morning! Let us show them what it is to make war upon a free people."

"Bravo! bravo!"

"And now," continued the orator, "now, in order that the army may have no share in the glory—in order that the civil element, which is now held as naught, but which should be paramount, may secure recognition—in order, I repeat, that to the civil element alone may belong the glory of having saved the country—I ask that this society declare itself a permanent institution, and that a register be opened to record the names of such courageous citizens here present

as may desire to inscribe them there, and that the sortie be made to-morrow morning, in force, as soon as the gates of the city are opened."

This last proposal was greeted with frantic applause, and when the huge register, which had already figured more than once in demonstrations of this kind was placed on the desk, the enthusiasm of the audience knew no bounds.

Every one was rushing forward to record their names, when a woman, who was sitting in the gallery, rose, and planting her hands on her hips, called out in a shrill voice:

"None of that! We know you. You'll sneak out the side door as soon as you've signed your names. That won't do! I move that all who really mean business take their places on the platform behind the desk."

Though this suggestion was not at all to the taste of many of the audience, the women present approved it so heartily that the masculine element dared not object.

Taupier opened his register, and the defile of the future heroes began.

"All-this won't amount to anything," muttered Frapillon. And the remark certainly showed a profound knowledge of the human heart, for before a quarter of an hour had elapsed the woman in the gallery shouted, in tones of thunder:

"The cowards! There's a door behind the platform, and they are sneaking out of it whenever they get a chance."

This revelation was the signal for a frightful uproar.

Taupier rose majestically and declared the meeting adjourned, and Frapillon in company with Pilevert, beat a hasty retreat, though he was firmly resolved to find out if the public meeting was to be followed by a secret session. He was still standing in the midst of the crowd, undecided what course to pursue, when he saw Taupier forcing his way through the throng, only a few steps from him, closely followed by the long, lank form of Alcindor.

"Where the deuce are they going in such hot haste?" muttered Frapillon. "I must find out before I go to the Rue de Laval. Make haste, Pilevert, for I don't want to lose sight of them. They may turn into one of the small streets leading to the heights, and in that case we should find it impossible to overtake them."

"Oh! if that's all that troubles you, you need have no fear, for I know where they're going. They're going to a sort of den not far from here, where they hold the private meeting of the 'Full Moon,' as they call it, once a week now."

"Impossible! I should certainly have heard of it."

"No; they distrust you, and it was that rascal Alcindor who suggested this arrangement."

"That is something worth knowing," muttered Frapillon. "But how is it? Are you admitted?"

"Yes, and no. I am obliged to stand guard sometimes. In fact I received orders to come this evening, but it's no fun to stay there until two or three o'clock in the morning, and I don't intend to do anything of the kind. I'm not going to have anything more to do with them. I'll be hanged if I am."

"You can sever your relations with them to-morrow, my dear Antoine, but this evening I want you to conduct me to the place in question."

"I've no objections, I'm sure. It's only a few steps from here, but you must look out for yourself, for they hate you like poison."

"I'm not afraid of them. Go ahead!"

"All right," responded the former acrobat, with a sigh, thinking of the comfortable bed that awaited him in a neighboring street, and the consoling pipe he would have smoked upon it.

The thoughts that engrossed J. B. Frapillon just at that moment were of a far more serious nature, for he was beginning to be really alarmed by the proceedings of his asso-

ciates, and this change in the place of their private meetings was not a good omen by any means. There must be grave reasons for their keeping these meetings a secret from him, the treasurer of the society and a member of the board of directors; but this made it all the more necessary for him to put an end to this unsatisfactory state of affairs, and he considered himself quite capable of intimidating his enemies.

About half-way up a narrow street that was lighted by only a single gas-jet, Pilevert paused in front of an open door leading into an alley, and remarked:

"Here it is!"

"Where? I see nothing."

"You will presently," responded the acrobat, with a low chuckle. "Take hold of the end of my blouse, and walk softly."

Frapillon was no lover of darkness, and for an instant he felt strongly tempted to abandon the enterprise; but he had gone too far to recoil; besides, he fancied he heard some one coming down the street, and he did not care to meet any one in such a place; so he concluded to follow Pilevert into the dark and slippery alley, where he could touch the wall on either side of him.

"Be careful now; we are coming to a flight of steps," said his companion.

"It must be into a cellar that you are taking me, then."

"Exactly, and an odd kind of a cellar at that."

His guide was even now cautiously making his way down a winding staircase that was even darker than the alley, and Frapillon, who did not let go his hold on his companion's blouse, counted nineteen steps before he reached a door through which a faint glimmer of light stole out.

Pilevert was only obliged to give it a slight push to make it turn noiselessly upon its hinges, and the two new arrivals found themselves in the presence of a man who was reading beside a small table, by the uncertain light of an oil-lamp.

"Why, is this you, citizen?" he remarked, gravely, on perceiving Pilevert. "I thought you were not coming this evening?"

"There seems to have been some misunderstanding. I am here, as you see."

"But you are not alone, and—"

Frapillon did not consider it necessary to waste time in talking to this man, who was no other than the venerable Bourignard, the servant and *concierge* of Valnoir, who had summoned him from the Rue de Navarre, in order to prevent any intrusion into the private session of the "Full Moon," so the diplomatist of the Rue Cadet suddenly disclosed to view a badge that seemed to inspire the *concierge* with profound awe.

"A member of the board of directors!" he exclaimed, as he glanced at the badge that Frapillon thrust under his nose. "Excuse me, citizen, I was so absorbed in one of the works of the great Saint Just that I—"

"Never mind, never mind," interrupted the former acrobat, "I'll show the gentleman in."

As he spoke he lifted a *portière* that concealed a door leading into a narrow passage. At the further end of the passage was another door, on the other side of which the council was evidently in progress, for the sound of an animated discussion reached Frapillon's ears.

He was separated from the speakers only by a thin door, and there was nothing to prevent him from listening, for he never sacrificed his interests for the sake of any foolish scruples.

He could hear the voices of the speakers, and even their words as distinctly as if he had been in the room, and he was not obliged to use his ears long to find out that they were talking about him. From the excited tones of the speakers, he felt satisfied that the discussion must have been going on for some time, and that Taupier and Alcindor had not arrived until after the session was partially

over. They seemed inclined to make up for lost time, however, for the first voice that reached Frapillon's ears was the voice of the hunchback.

"We had better settle the matter this very night," he heard Taupier remark.

"But not until after we have given him a hearing," drawled Alcindor.

"And why should we grant him a hearing? We did try to question him in the office this afternoon, you recollect, and you know how much satisfaction we got."

"Still, I should do it, if only for appearance's sake," insisted Pilevert's former pupil.

A more refined voice put an end to a discussion which threatened to degenerate into a quarrel—a voice Frapillon instantly recognized as that of his friend Valnoir.

"The fact is, you want to compel the treasurer of the society to render an account of his stewardship, do you not?" inquired the editor-in-chief of the "Serpenteau."

"Yes, yes!" replied the others, in chorus.

"That is all very well; but permit me to say that you will not be much better off if you succeed. It isn't the accounts that you want to see, but the money."

"I'll pay you for that, you scoundrel," muttered Frapillon, who had not lost a syllable of the conversation.

"That is what we do want, of course," replied Taupier, "and if I had not been obliged to preside over that crowd of idiots this evening I might have saved you any further trouble, for I know a way to get hold of the money."

Frapillon muttered an oath, and stepped a little closer to the door.

"About how much do you suppose this paragon of a treasurer has had the handling of since the founding of the society?" continued the hunchback.

"At least three hundred thousand francs," cried four or five members, simultaneously.

"Ah, well, the honest man in question purchased last

week three bonds, yielding a yearly dividend of six thousand francs each, which would represent about the sum you mention, and I know where these bonds are."

This revelation was greeted by a murmur of mingled delight and disapproval.

"These securities were placed in a carefully locked portfolio," continued Taupier, "and intrusted to the keeping of a quack doctor, named Molinchard, who resides in this neighborhood. What I would propose is this: By this time our treasurer must be sleeping the sleep of the just in his house on the Rue Cadet, like the model citizen he pretends to be. His mind is perfectly easy, for he feels sure that he has deposited his spoils in a safe place; and when Paris capitulates, as it must in a few days, he will deny that he ever had any such property in his possession, and you must realize the utter uselessness of appealing to the courts for redress. This being the case, I know of but one means of obtaining justice, and that is to take the law into your own hands."

"That would not be a very easy matter, it seems to me," remarked Valnoir.

"On the contrary, there would not be the slightest difficulty under the circumstances. We have here a number of blank receipts bearing Frapillon's signature. Above his name I will write a few words in our friend's handwriting—such, for instance, as: 'Give the red portfolio to the bearer of this note.' I'll take this order to Molinchard, who lives only a few steps from here, and in an hour, at the very latest, I will bring you the securities."

"You shall pay dearly for this, you scoundrel," muttered Frapillon, clinching his fists savagely.

Contrary to Taupier's expectations, this proposal was not very enthusiastically received. The majority, indeed, maintained a prudent silence that did not indicate much confidence in Taupier's probity. One of the members present even went so far as to say:

"I think it would be advisable to appoint three delegates for this mission."

"Just as you please," replied the hunchback, promptly. "I am not quick to take offense when the interests of the society are at stake, and the precaution does not wound me. Choose my fellow-delegates, and hand me one of those receipts, so I can write the note to Molinchard."

This was too much. Frapillon could contain himself no longer; and, dashing open the door, he presented himself to the wondering gaze of the members of the board of directors.

His sudden appearance before them produced very much the effect of the famous head of Medusa. Each person remained in the same attitude as before the shock came. Valnoir was leaning back in an arm-chair; Alcindor was standing, and Taupier was leaning over the table to perpetrate the forgery he meditated. Of the others present, those who were terrified by this sudden intrusion hung their heads, and those of a more irascible temperament faced the intruder defiantly.

The scene was certainly well worth contemplating, especially as a long table strewn with papers and mugs of beer imparted to it a slight resemblance to Belshazzar's famous feast.

But J. B. Frapillon, who played the part of celestial vengeance in this case, assumed no undue severity of mien. While he was listening at the door, he had had plenty of time to decide upon his course, and he had resolved to use persuasion if possible.

"Why, how odd you all look!" he exclaimed, with a cold laugh that made the flesh of his auditors creep.

The hunchback, who had regained his self-possession in some measure, came to the assistance of his terrified companions.

"We were not expecting you, you know," he began; "and in times like these—"

"You are in constant fear of the police, of course; but why didn't you tell me that you were holding your private meetings here?"

This question was put in a low tone of careless good-humor, which would have deceived any one, no matter how suspicious he might naturally be.

"You see, we couldn't meet in the usual place on the evening of a public meeting," began Valnoir.

"It seems to me that it wouldn't have been the first time, however, as the side-door is there by which to re-enter the hall after the crowd has passed out."

"I heard that the police had been ordered to keep an eye on us," growled Taupier, "and so—"

"Oh, it's a matter of no consequence whatever. The new quarters seem admirably chosen, and as our friend Pilevert was able to guide me here, it is all for the best."

"So it was that brute who told you—"

Valnoir, who had rashly allowed this exclamation to escape his lips, checked himself just in time.

Frapillon showed no signs of having heard him, but remarked, with marvelous calmness:

"I was very fortunate in meeting our mutual friend; for I felt quite anxious to see you again, as you must, of course, understand."

"And why?" inquired the hunchback, insolently.

"Why? Why, to complete the explanation I began in your office to-day."

"What explanation?" asked Valnoir, greatly surprised.

"Why, you were telling me only to-day that the society desired a statement of its financial condition, and of course I am anxious to render it without delay."

"Oh, you can take your time," stammered the editor-in-chief of the "Serpenteau." "There's no hurry—"

"I am not a journalist, my dear friend, but a practical business man; and I can not treat money matters lightly;

besides, I am 'anxious to vindicate myself, as I have been denounced—"

"Denounced is not exactly the word," muttered the hunchback.

"Denounced or accused, call it whichever you please. I am not so particular about my choice of words, and I do not even ask who doubts my honesty, though I have my suspicions. As I told you this afternoon," exclaimed Frapillon, "I intended to put my accounts in order without delay, and I should have brought them here this evening, and the funds of the society as well, if my time had not been occupied with other matters ever since our conversation. In the first place, after leaving you, I had a long controversy with two men who had sworn to exterminate our friend Valnoir. If it had been simply a case of pacifying them on account of your recent attack upon the army, I should have allowed them to settle the matter with Master Antoine here, but their grievance seemed to be in some way connected with your late duel at Saint Germain. They spoke of proofs, and talked of complaining to the authorities, and our friend Taupier's name was also mixed up in the matter. I calmed them by telling them that you were ill, and asking them to call again in three days."

"And these persons were—"

"A civilian and a soldier about whom you need not trouble yourself in the least, however; for I have found a means of preventing their threatened visit, for I do not desert my friends, as you know very well."

The emphasis placed upon the word *I* lessened the hostility of Valnoir and Taupier very perceptibly, for they felt that their secret was in Frapillon's hands, and that it would not do to go too far.

"The society desires a statement of its financial condition, I understand," resumed Frapillon. "I am ready to give it, and will do so to-morrow evening; but in the meantime, I can tell you how these funds are invested. The

money has been converted temporarily into bonds which I have deposited in a bank for safe-keeping."

Taupier could hardly repress a grimace of disappointment.

"Yes," repeated Frapillon, looking him full in the face, "I intrusted them first to a friend, but thinking afterward that a bank would be the safest place in a time like this, I took them there this very morning."

"We will take your word for it. We do not ask to see them," said Valnoir, timidly, casting a furtive glance at his companions.

"Whether you do or not, I intend to resign them to your charge. I do not like to be suspected, so I must ask the board to be kind enough to choose another treasurer."

This unexpected request produced the effect intended. Murmurs of approval, followed by energetic protests, resounded on every side, and Alcindor, who had held his peace up to this time, for a wonder, now felt himself called upon to give voice to the sentiments of the assembly.

"Cæsar," he began in his most impressive tones, "declared that his wife must be above suspicion. It is the same feeling doubtless that prompts our worthy friend Citizen Frapillon—"

But his little speech was brought to an abrupt termination by the entrance of Pilevert, who rushed into the room shouting—"The police! the police!"

The members of the society sprung to their feet as if they had received an electric shock. Some disappeared under the table, others rushed wildly around the room, while the bravest sprung forward to bar the passage of an imaginary enemy.

Frapillon, however, being an eminently practical man, was already questioning Antoine about the invasion that seemed to threaten the "Full Moon" with an untimely eclipse.

"What is the matter, idiot?" he asked, departing from his usually urbane manner.

"The police!" gasped the terrified acrobat.

"You said so before; but where are they?"

"I swear I heard—"

"Heard what?"

"The rallying cry of the police."

"You certainly have lost your senses. It doesn't matter, however. I'll go and see for myself," he added, pushing Antoine aside.

"Stay where you are, all the rest of you, until I come back," he added, as he left the room.

This injunction seemed superfluous, however, as the room occupied by the conspirators had no other outlet than the passage into which Frapillon had just stepped. Pilevert concluded to follow his patron, and in another minute both men found themselves in the little ante-chamber where they had left Bourignard.

Frapillon had only to glance at that worthy to perceive that he was a prey to the most profound terror. He was trembling like a leaf, and the works of the great Saint Just were lying unnoticed at his feet. Something of a most appalling nature must certainly have happened, still Frapillon heard nothing or saw nothing alarming.

"I really believe you must all have gone mad!" he growled.

This uncomplimentary remark had hardly passed his lips, when a voice only a few feet from him exclaimed—

"I arrest you in the name of the law."

Frapillon turned in the twinkling of an eye, but no human being was visible. The voice seemed to proceed from the staircase—a deep bass voice that its possessor seemed desirous of making as terrible as possible.

"Do you hear that?" moaned the terrified Bourignard.

"Yes, I do. It is only some one trying to play a joke on you," said Frapillon, who was sufficiently familiar with the habits of the police to know that they did not announce their visits in such a boisterous manner.

"Surrender!" cried the mysterious voice.

But this time the hoax was apparent, for the deep bass voice had suddenly turned into a shrill falsetto.

Frapillon felt convinced that the owner of it was merely some mischievous *gamin*, and instantly made a rush for the stairs, calling to Pilevert as he did so—

"Come and help me catch him!"

It is not a very easy matter to run up a winding staircase, and just as they set foot in the alley the urchin darted into the street, and though Frapillon reached the open door with a couple of bounds, he could see in the dim distance only an indistinct form that kept close in the shadow of the houses.

"It isn't worth while to take any more trouble for the sake of a mere boy," growled Frapillon.

"He certainly can boast of having given us a fine scare," gasped Antoine, who was puffing and blowing in a fashion that showed that running was not a favorite pastime with him.

"Speak for yourself, if you please."

"Yes, for myself, and the others down there. Suppose we leave them awhile just to see what they will do?"

This proposal was not at all displeasing to Frapillon. He had already had a little time for reflection, and he said to himself that he would be very foolish not to take advantage of this excellent opportunity to cut his explanation short. Once before that day a plausible excuse had presented itself for putting an abrupt end to an embarrassing situation, and this impromptu departure would prevent any possible unpleasantness, so there was nothing to prevent him from enjoying the mischievous pleasure of leaving the members of the society a prey to abject terror. Moreover, the time had at last come for a much more important undertaking.

"Now, my brave fellow, the time for winning Bradamante has come," he said, gravely.

"That suits me!" cried Antoine enthusiastically.

"Come, then."

"Where are we going?"

"Only a few steps from here."

After this brief dialogue, the two men hastened toward the boulevard without exchanging another word.

As he crossed the Place Pigalle on his way to the Rue Frochot, J. B. Frapillon thought over his expedition and its attendant difficulties. Up to the present time all his efforts had proved eminently successful, and there seemed to be little probability that his visit to the cottage would be fraught with any serious danger.

Renée and her aunt who were prisoners in his friend Molinchart's establishment, gave him no uneasiness whatever, and he had long since ceased to fear the natural protectors of the Saint Senier family.

Before turning into the Rue de Laval, however, he glanced behind him to make sure that he was not followed, but saw no one. The street was deserted, still some one might appear at any moment, and a long halt before the gate was to be avoided if possible.

One serious difficulty attended the very beginning of the undertaking, for Frapillon was by no means sure that he should be able to open the gate. He recollected perfectly having seen Renée de Saint Senier press a spring that opened this gate when he accompanied her to the cottage after their meeting on the Place Pigalle; but he did not know exactly where to find this spring, and any prolonged search for it would not only consume precious time, but be likely to arouse Pilevert's suspicions; and though the acrobat was by no means scrupulous, he might seriously object to taking any part in an attempt at housebreaking. Consequently Frapillon was anxious, if possible, to convey the impression that he was entering a house with which he was familiar or that belonged to him.

Resolved, therefore, to make no experiments in his

satellite's presence if it could be avoided, he turned to him and remarked:

"Say, my friend, step out into the middle of the street and see if any one is watching us."

The request was promptly obeyed, and Frapillon instantly took advantage of this opportunity to search for the spring. The gate was adorned with several heavy iron knobs, and as nature had endowed Frapillon with the true detective instinct, he instantly suspected that the spring must be concealed in one of these.

So he pressed upon them hastily, one by one, and his usual good luck did not desert him.

On pressing the fourth knob the door flew open, and just as it yielded to Frapillon's touch, Pilevert left his post of observation to rejoin his superior officer.

"Did you see any one?" inquired Frapillon.

"I saw something black on the sidewalk at the corner of the Rue Frochot. I think it must be a cat or a dog. It certainly is not a man. I will go and see, though, if you want me to."

"It isn't worth while," replied Frapillon, motioning his companion to enter first. Once inside the inclosure, Frapillon felt that the time for a little diplomacy had come, for he could not expect Pilevert to execute his orders without some preliminary explanation. Frapillon would have no difficulty in inventing some plausible explanation, however, for he was no novice in falsehood; besides, Pilevert was too stupid to be very suspicious.

He was now standing there leaning against the wall, and gazing abstractedly at the lindens that bordered the walk in front of him.

"Does this garden belong to you?" he inquired, with a wondering air.

"Yes; but I don't come here very often," replied Frapillon, "and I must have a great deal of confidence in you to bring you here. You can hardly fail to understand that."

"Eh?" said Antoine, opening his eyes wide in astonishment.

"Listen, my dear Antoine," continued the cashier, in a friendly and familiar tone; "I have taken a great fancy to you, and I don't want to have any secrets from you. You see, my friend, this is the place where I keep my papers—all this is just between ourselves, you understand—and my money; for you know one can not take too many precautions in times like these."

"You are right; for only a few minutes ago those unprincipled journalists were talking of stealing your money from you."

"Exactly; and it is chiefly on their account that I am obliged to guard my property so closely. In fact, I come here only at night, and I don't like to come alone, for the same reason. I have therefore resolved to make you an offer which I trust will prove satisfactory to you."

"Is it to restore Bradamante to me immediately?"

"You know I have already promised to do that, and I never fail to keep my word."

"Then you will give me—"

"The two thousand francs? Yes, of course, to-morrow, this very night, if you like. Stop, stop, you needn't thank me; besides, we have no time to lose, so let me finish what I have to say to you. The mare and the wagon are yours, that is understood; but they will not be of much use to you at present, as you can not leave the city; so in the meantime I will give you some employment that will suit you pretty well, I fancy."

"I should like it much better than what I am doing now, I am sure."

"I think so myself, for it is simply to guard that cottage you see at the end of the walk. You will have a comfortable room there, and nothing to do but smoke your pipe and enjoy a barrel of wine that I will place in the cellar for your use."

"I should say that it will suit me, then!" exclaimed Pilevert.

"Then I will install you there to-morrow."

"And this evening?"

"This evening you are going to do me the favor to wait here while I go up to the house!"

"Shall you be gone long?"

"Not more than an hour. I have some papers to look over, and I shall feel much more comfortable if I know that you are standing guard."

"You needn't be afraid. No one will get in."

"Very well. If I should need you, however, I will summon you with this," said Frapillon, drawing a small silver whistle from his pocket.

"All right, you can count upon me."

Without vouchsafing any further explanation, Frapillon started up the walk, and after ascending the steps leading to the door of the cottage, he leisurely selected from the bunch of keys stolen from Renée one that fitted the lock. It must be admitted that his hand trembled a little as he turned the key, but he had overcome similar trepidation a host of times, during his eventful life, and he stepped boldly into the hall, though he took care to leave the door open behind him in order that he might remain in communication with his protector outside.

He had taken the precaution to bring a candle with him, and drawing a box of matches from his pocket he now proceeded to light it.

A glance around the hall satisfied him that everything was exactly as he had left it the evening before. Several garments were hanging on the racks, and a shawl was lying across the back of a chair, where it had been overlooked in the confusion of a hurried departure. In the room, too, where he had first seen the Countess de Muire everything was unchanged.

The book the countess was reading when she fainted was

still lying open upon the table, and a piece of tapestry work and some wools were still in the arm-chair where Renée had hastily thrown them in her alarm at her aunt's sudden illness.

After a quick glance around the room Frapillon left it, for he knew beforehand that he would not find what he was seeking there.

On his first visit he had gained a pretty correct idea of the arrangement of the house, and knew that the first floor consisted of a small drawing-room—the apartment he had just inspected—a dining-room and another room that overlooked the garden. He found the door that led into this unlocked, and he had only to turn the knob to enter it.

Long and narrow, and divided by a large tapestry hanging, this room had been so accurately described to him by Mouchabeuf that he recognized it at the first glance.

“This is the room they took the girl from,” he muttered, “and there is the window by which they made their escape. How strange, it is open!”

Frapillon, surprised, and a trifle alarmed, stepped to the window and looked out; but seeing nothing except the leafless branches of the shrubs planted around the cottage, and hearing no sound, he finally concluded that the window must have been opened by one of the ladies who had forgotten to close it, and so troubled himself no further about this trifling incident. He did think strongly of closing the window, however, but being afraid of making a noise, he finally left it as he found it.

The moment for exploring the floor above had come, and with his impatience to reach it was mingled a vague apprehension. He had been assured that a light appeared in the upper story every evening at a certain hour. Valnoir had told him something about having seen a woman kneeling beside a white curtained bed, and the young girl had trembled and turned pale when he spoke of paying a visit to the cottage; but though Frapillon felt sure that some

mystery was concealed here, he had no idea of the nature of this mystery. This roof, so sedulously guarded from visitors, might shelter some person who was desirous of concealing himself, and who would consequently be likely to give any intruder a pretty warm reception.

These uncomfortable reflections passed through his mind as he slowly and cautiously ascended the stairs leading to the floor above, but just as he reached the top of it, this train of thought was suddenly interrupted by a gust of wind that extinguished his candle.

"All the windows in the house must be open," he muttered angrily.

He had reached a narrow hall similar to the one in the story below, so he paused to strike a match, but while he was fumbling in his pocket for it, he fancied he perceived a faint light in the distance—the light of a lamp or a candle shining out from under the door of a room at the further end of the corridor.

As this room was lighted, it must be occupied by some one, and the discovery alarmed him; still, not the slightest sound broke the silence that pervaded the passage. He could not take his eyes off the mysterious light. Indeed, it seemed to have a strange fascination for him, though in reality, he was racking his brain to discover some plausible explanation of the phenomenon. The necessity of immediate action speedily presented itself to his mind, however, and congratulating himself on the accident that had extinguished his own candle—for he was anxious to see without being seen—he at last stole softly down the long corridor, intending to beat a hasty retreat in the darkness if necessary.

So slow and cautious was his progress that it took him more than five minutes to traverse the fifteen or twenty feet that lay between him and the door, but he reached it at last, and holding his breath, he placed his ear to the door that separated him from the mystery.

It seemed to be his fate to listen at doors that night, but this time he was not as well paid for his trouble as at the rendezvous of the leading spirits of the "Moon with the Teeth," for though he strained his ears to the uttermost not a sound could he detect on the other side of the door against which he was leaning.

But to his intense dismay, he heard a loud rapping at the garden gate, and Frapillon's heart sunk like lead; but to his great surprise and unspeakable relief this ominous sound soon ceased, and was followed by no other disturbance. Pilevert evidently had shown the good sense not to respond to this peremptory summons, and as it was not repeated, Frapillon began to think that some mischievous or partially intoxicated passer-by had knocked merely for the fun of the thing, as rollicking collegians amuse themselves by pulling door-bells.

As no sound proceeded from the chamber, Frapillon finally summoned up courage to apply his eye to the key-hole. He saw a lamp of antique form upon a table strewn with papers and bottles of different sizes, but the door being near a corner of the room, the rest of the apartment was not visible.

The unbroken silence that still reigned, however, at last began to convince him that the room was not occupied. He even began to believe that the light must have been burning ever since the evening before, thanks to some peculiarity in its construction.

Frapillon straightened himself up and reflected a moment, and the result of this deliberation was a firm resolve to fathom the mystery then and there; but as he was about to place his hand on the knob, the door was slowly opened. Frapillon recoiled with such celerity that the door met with no resistance, and as it opened it entirely concealed the spy who was crouching in a corner of the passage.

In spite of his courage and presence of mind, the next moment was one of frightful anxiety.

The door that turned so noiselessly upon its hinges had certainly been pushed open by the mysterious inmate of the chamber, and whoever he might be, his appearance upon the scene of action was by no means reassuring.

The diplomatist of the Rue Cadet had no fondness for physical combats, and though he had a revolver in his pocket, he bitterly regretted his faithful Pilevert's absence.

He even thought of whistling for him, but if there was to be a struggle, it would evidently be over before the arrival of any re-enforcements.

So he remained perfectly quiet and motionless, and he certainly had no reason to repent of his prudence, for the protecting door moved no further. The person who had opened it neglected to close it, and Frapillon continued to enjoy the advantages of his position, for his hiding-place served both as a fortress and an observatory, as through the space left between the door and the wall he could see all that was passing in the corridor.

It was not very dark in the passage, on account of the light that shone from the interior of the chamber, but the lamp was so placed that the light did extend far beyond the threshold.

The man that had emerged from the room was tall and rather solidly built, so far as his costume enabled one to judge, for he wore a long white woollen garment that enveloped him from head to foot, with a hood that was drawn down over his eyes. His back was turned toward Frapillon as he walked slowly down the corridor, and he must have had on cloth slippers, for no footfall was audible as he glided over the floor. Indeed, a person who was superstitiously inclined would have felt sure that this strange personage was a ghost; but when one has been a broker for fifteen years one ceases to believe in the return of the inhabitants of the celestial world, and Frapillon felt perfectly well satisfied that he had to deal with a creature of plain flesh and blood.

As the mysterious personage had now reached the further end of the corridor and was slowly descending the stairs, Frapillon felt strongly inclined to take immediate advantage of this opportunity to explore the sanctuary in which the secrets of the family were doubtless concealed. But tempting as the opportunity was, it was not unattended with danger, for the midnight promenader might return at any moment and discover the intruder; so being a prudent man, Frapillon decided not to risk it, but contented himself with a rapid survey of the room from the open doorway. To his great surprise, he saw nothing extraordinary about the apartment; the table he had seen through the key-hole, a vacant arm-chair, the end of a long curtain that must have concealed a bed—these were the sole contents of the room.

“The secret is the man in white,” concluded Frapillon, shrewdly.

Making his way cautiously through the corridor, and then down the staircase, he again reached the lower hall where, to his very great relief, he found everything exactly as he had left it, so in all probability the inmate of the cottage had merely passed through it on his way to the room formerly occupied by Regina.

Frapillon instantly decided upon his course. Softly opening the outside door, he slipped out, rushed down the steps and ran with all his might toward the place where he had left Pilevert.

He found that worthy leaning against the wall, blowing his fingers.

“Great Jupiter, I’m glad to see you back!” he exclaimed. “My nose is nearly frozen, and there isn’t a particle of feeling in my fingers.”

“I’ll give you some work to warm you up, my brave fellow. I just discovered a thief up there at the house, and as he didn’t see me, I think, between us, we shall have no difficulty in capturing him.”

"I'm your man. Lead the way!" exclaimed the acrobat, enthusiastically.

"Be quiet, Pilevert, be quiet! Did you hear no noise in the street, while you were on guard here?"

"Oh, yes, but nothing of any consequence. Some fellows pounded on the gate, just for fun, as they passed, that's all."

"Come with me, then," replied Frapillon, starting toward the cottage, "and I'll explain what I want you to do for me as we go along."

Pilevert followed him obediently, but they hadn't gone ten steps before they both turned to look back, for both had heard a slight creaking sound behind them, a sound strongly resembling a cautious footstep.

Frapillon, satisfied that no one could open the gate leading into the street, thought at first that he must be mistaken, but soon he distinctly heard footsteps on the frozen ground.

"Somebody's coming!" whispered the acrobat.

"Impossible!" faltered his astonished and now thoroughly frightened companion.

"I'm sure of it. Hark! they have stopped; they must have seen us."

What Pilevert said was perfectly true, and Frapillon could no longer blind himself to the fact that some one was indeed in the garden.

It certainly could not be the mysterious personage he had left in the cottage, but who else could have entered the garden, and in what way had he succeeded in doing it, for the existence of the secret spring could be known only to the inmates of the cottage and their particular friends.

"What if that fool of a Molinhard has allowed the women to escape?" thought Frapillon.

"Let us go and see who it is!" said the acrobat. "You go first, and wring the neck of the very first person you meet."

Master Antoine was in an exceedingly valiant mood that evening—the magnificent promises made to him having excited him to such a degree that he could realize the existence of no serious obstacles, so he dashed down the walk, swinging his arms like an athlete who is preparing himself for a desperate struggle.

The overcautious Frapillon, pistol in hand, brought up the rear.

The path was very dark on account of the thick roof formed by the branches, but where it began about three or four yards from the little gate, there was a vacant space where every object was distinctly visible.

“They must have concealed themselves behind that clump of shrubbery, for I see no one,” remarked Pilevert, but he nevertheless hastened on a little in advance of his patron.

Just as he reached the last linden, a man suddenly appeared before him, and Pilevert, feeling it his duty to faithfully carry out the instructions he had received, sprung forward and clutched the new-comer savagely by the throat.

“Wretch!” cried the stranger, swaying to and fro like a reed in the powerful grasp of the former acrobat. Frapillon hastened up to encourage his subordinate with voice and gesture, and the affair seemed likely to terminate in a murder, when the sudden appearance of another party upon the scene of action changed the aspect of affairs completely.

A woman had suddenly rushed out from behind the clump of shrubbery, and darted toward the combatants, where, by clinging to Pilevert’s clothing, she succeeded in raising herself until her face was close to his.

The acrobat uttered a cry, and instantly released his opponent, who drew back and assumed an attitude of defense.

“Regina!” repeated Antoine. “Regina! can it be this is you?”

The formidable antagonist of a moment before was now trembling like a child. It is difficult to say whether the feeling he experienced was one of joy or fear, for first he sprung forward with open arms as if to press the girl to his heart, and the next moment he recoiled, as if confronted by a specter.

It was very different with Frapillon.

The name uttered by his satellite had thrown him into a furious passion. He could not understand this return of one he had supposed safely out of his way forever, but he wanted to end the affair before Pilevert had time for reflection.

"Kill him! kill him! my brave fellow!" he cried, "kill him while I attend to this hussy!"

As he spoke, he rushed toward Regina, pistol in hand.

"No, no, patron. I won't have my little deaf-and-dumb girl harmed!" cried Pilevert, giving him a blow on the arm that dashed the revolver to the ground.

And before Frapillon recovered from his astonishment, the stranger had picked up the weapon and leveled it at the broker's breast, and the acrobat made no attempt to prevent this aggressive movement on the part of his late adversary.

He seemed to have become petrified.

It was evident that Regina had conquered him, but to complete her victory, she threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him affectionately, and Antoine lifted her high in the air, heaving a sigh of mingled joy and relief the while.

He looked very much like a bear playing with a bird.

"There's not the slightest doubt of it!" he exclaimed, as he replaced her on the ground. "It is my little Regina! Nothing is wanting but Bradamante now!"

"Fool!" hissed Frapillon, now completely beside himself, "if you want me to buy your horse back for you, help me kill these people."

"Regina? Never!" replied the *acrobat*, resolutely. "You can do what you like with the other one."

But the other one did not seem inclined to allow Frapillon to carry out his intentions, for he took a step forward, with his pistol still leveled at Frapillon.

"The first person that moves I'll blow his brains out!" he said, in a tone that fully convinced one of his sincerity.

No sooner had she been released by her old employer than the young girl placed herself beside the stranger, as if to give the others to understand that she espoused his cause; then, by an imperious gesture, she ordered the *acrobat* to join them, and he obeyed with wonderful docility.

Frapillon ground his teeth with rage.

"I know you!" said the stranger, turning to Pilevert, "and you know me—"

"Great Jupiter! I hope lightning may striko me if—"

"You met me in the forest of Saint Germain, the day those scoundrels foully murdered my cousin in a duel."

"Impossible! No—but wait— Yes, it was you—the officer of *Mobiles*."

"Yes—rescued by this young girl who loves you, and who bids you assist me in avenging her and friends of mine persecuted by the same scoundrels."

"Where are they! Let me get hold of them. I'll tear them limb from limb!"

"I think we have one of the culprits here," said Roger de Saint Senier, who had not once removed his eyes from Frapillon's face.

"That is false!"

But even as this impudent denial escaped the terrified broker Pilevert growled:

"What! my patron? Impossible! He's a kind-hearted man that is going to buy a wagon for me, and—"

"What are you doing here?" interrupted Roger.

Frapillon's only reply was a growl of rage, but the artless Antoine at once volunteered an explanation.

"I'll tell you, lieutenant—for you certainly are the lieutenant, though I didn't recognize you at first on account of your blouse. This gentleman is in his own house, you see—"

"In his own house? He lies. The cottage belongs to relatives of mine."

"Why, you don't tell me so!" exclaimed Pilevert, apparently more and more inclined to abandon Frapillon's cause.

"And any person who breaks into another person's house at night is very likely to go to the galleys," continued Roger, coldly.

"Great Jupiter! I've no desire to go there, I haven't!"

"Then why did you accompany this man here? Tell me frankly, if you don't want me to have you arrested."

"Because he told me a pack of lies—told me he kept his money here—that he was afraid of thieves—that he had even found one in the house, and because he is one of the owners of the newspaper to which I am indebted for a living."

"The 'Serpenteau,' I suppose," said Roger, who was beginning to understand the situation.

"Yes, that is what they call it."

"I know all I want to know now," said the lieutenant.

"And now listen to me," he added, stepping so close to Frapillon that he could touch him with his revolver.

"I am listening, but I shall not answer you."

"I came here about an hour ago," continued Roger. "and I little expected to find, on my return, the instigator of the crime that was committed while this young lady and myself were prisoners in the hands of the Prussians."

"A crime!" repeated Pilevert, "a crime, did you say?"

"This cottage was occupied by two ladies, who have mysteriously disappeared. Where are they?" said the lieutenant.

"I didn't know that I was responsible for them," replied Frapillon, insolently.

"To-morrow morning the authorities will be notified," continued the officer, "and I feel very sure that they will find a way to make you speak."

"You propose to arrest me, then? You do not dare."

"If you will tell me what has become of my relatives I may let you go free, though I will not pledge myself to do so; if you refuse I shall ask this man you have so grossly deceived to assist me in arresting you, and between us I think we shall succeed in taking you to the nearest commissioner of police."

The gate was only three steps from him, and Frapillon would have to make but a single bound to reach it, open it, and disappear, but the pistol deterred him.

"Arrest me if you dare," he cried, seizing the pistol leveled at his forehead.

Roger resisted his efforts to secure the weapon, and in the scuffle that ensued the pistol was discharged, and the diplomatist of the Rue Cadet fell lifeless to the ground.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FEW days after the tragedy in the garden of the cottage three persons were sitting with Valnoir in his little smoking room on the Rue de Navarin.

Rose de Charmière was lolling nonchalantly on a Turkish divan, enjoying a cigarette, while Taupier, half buried in a low arm-chair, was holding an open newspaper from which he seemed about to read an extract.

Bourignard was standing by the door, in a respectful attitude which was by no means destitute of dignity, however.

As for the proprietor of the establishment, he was walking to and fro, with his hands behind him—apparently absorbed in contemplating the fantastic design of the Turkey carpet, for he did not raise his eyes from the floor; and, indeed, from the expression of gravity on every face, it was

evident that some important subject was under consideration.

"Let us hear your *chef-d'œuvre*," remarked Valnoir, without pausing in his promenade.

"Here it is!" said Taupier, in the pompous tone he always used in reading his own productions.

"The tragical event that recently occurred in the Rue de Laval is still shrouded in mystery. Our readers doubtless recollect that one night last week two policemen found, on the sidewalk, the dead body of a man whose forehead bore a wound made by a pistol that had evidently been fired at very close range.

"At first it was considered a case of suicide, and this supposition was strengthened by the fact that a pistol was found lying beside the body; but now everything seems to indicate that the physician who conducted the examination was mistaken.

"The body has since been identified as that of a highly respectable citizen, a captain in the 365th battalion, and one of the strongest champions of democratic principles in our unfortunate city.

"J. B. Frapillon had been a resident of the Rue Cadet for many long years, and was much loved and respected by his numerous clients, who will never forget his urbanity and wonderful kindness of heart.

"He was a pure and upright man."

"Hum! that's a little too steep, it seems to me," muttered Valnoir.

"Nonsense! if there were no fools in the world to believe what is said in funeral sermons, none would ever be preached," retorted Taupier, impatiently.

And he resumed his reading:

"J. B. Frapillon was bound to us not only by ties of the closest friendship, but also by a congeniality of sentiment and political opinions.

"The business manager of our journal, he always performed his important duties with a zeal and integrity that was above all praise, and the services he rendered to the people's cause can hardly be overestimated.

"The editorial staff of the 'Serpenteau' can not refrain from paying this well-deserved tribute to his memory—but they have an even more sacred duty to perform—that of avenging him!"

"You will get yourself into trouble with the authorities. They never like to have the public meddle with their affairs," remarked the editor-in-chief.

"That makes no difference to me," retorted the irreverent hunchback. "This article will sell at least ten thousand extra papers for us to-morrow, and yet you complain."

"That is the chief consideration after all," remarked Mlle. de Charmière, who was of an eminently practical turn of mind.

"Paragraph 3d," cried Taupier, in the very same tone Lemaître employs in the rôle of "Don Caesar de Bazan."

"Why should J. B. Frapillon, a paragon of uprightness, a man who was not only universally respected, but who was devoted to the noblest of causes, and the possessor of a modest competence, commit suicide?"

"Such an idea is simply absurd.

"No, this model citizen, this earnest and indefatigable laborer for the public welfare would never have thus forsaken his post of duty and the interests of the democracy; and if one wishes to discover the real cause of his death, one must call to mind the old maxim, '*Is fecit cui prodest.*'"

"So you are spouting Latin to them now!" exclaimed Valnoir. "You really must have gone mad."

"You don't know anything about journalism, my dear

fellow. Our readers don't understand the language, but the use of it flatters them."

"Our friend was detested by the reactionists," he continued, "consequently there is very little doubt that he was assassinated by the reactionists."

"J. B. Frapillon was found dead in front of a house which has been looked upon for some time as the rendezvous of aristocrats and traitors."

"Almost from the beginning of the siege the cottage on the Rue de Laval has been regarded with suspicion by all patriotic citizens. Lights of different colors have been seen burning there at night, and the well-known weakness of the government in such matters is alone to blame for the failure to investigate this affair."

"It is true that this rendezvous of spies has been visited since the crime, and no one found there, but the friends of an effete monarchy and of the Prussians had had time to make their escape."

"We ourselves are perfectly well satisfied that it was in endeavoring to gain an entrance into this den of conspirators for the purpose of unveiling their machinations that J. B. Frapillon met his death."

"It is for this reason we ask that an investigation shall be made, and a careful and diligent investigation by magistrates who are both tried and trusted democrats."

"If the government persists in treating reactionists with a consideration that is not shown to patriotic citizens—if this demand for an investigation is refused—ah, well, we ourselves will undertake it."

After this sensational conclusion Taupier assumed the studied attitude of an actor who is awaiting a burst of applause.

But the applause was not forthcoming.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked at last. "It strikes me that it's not bad," he added, with ill-concealed complacency.

"It is simply idiotic," replied Valnoir, shrugging his shoulders.

"Then why didn't you write it yourself?"

"Because I didn't think any further notice of the matter advisable."

"May I ask your motive in writing such an article?" inquired Rose.

"Why, to protect ourselves against any attack from that Saint Senier crowd," cried Taupier. "You surely don't suppose I am troubling myself about that old cur, Frapillon. Besides, the surest means of discovering the money will be to insist upon an investigation. If he really deposited it in the bank, as he assured us at our last meeting, we shall have a hard time getting hold of it."

"Language was given us to conceal our thoughts," said the fair Rose, sententiously, "and I should advise you to try Doctor Molinchart, after all."

We might make an attempt in that direction, but in the meantime I should like to get hold of Pilevert, for I feel almost sure that we could find out all we want to know through him."

"His disappearance is certainly very astonishing," muttered Valnoir.

"You told me, I think," began the practical Rose, "that Pilevert brought Frapillon to the place where the 'Moon with the Teeth' was in secret session, and in that case Bourignard, who was guarding the door at the time, may be able to give us some valuable information."

"It was for that very reason I asked him to come up," remarked the editor-in-chief of the "Serpenteau."
"Come, Master Bourignard, let us hear your testimony."

The porter, who had listened to the foregoing conversation with much apparent interest, now took three steps forward, and bowed politely, but without losing any of his dignity.

"I am ready, citizens, to give you all the information in

my power," he said, majestically. "I was sitting quietly reading the works of the great Saint Just when I suddenly heard a voice—"

This testimony, however, was interrupted at the very outset by the shrill voice of Agricola, whose fox-like face suddenly appeared at his father's elbow.

"Any admission?" he piped.

"My good Bourignard, you are certainly bringing up your offspring very badly," said Valnoir, who was greatly annoyed at this intrusion.

The porter's gold spectacles trembled on his imposing nose, but he could find nothing to say in reply, so great was the humiliation he felt at receiving this reproach, and so intense the anger excited by this new escapade on the part of his hopeful son.

"Come in, you young rascal," growled Taupier.

The invitation did not have to be repeated, however. Agricola slipped, like a serpent, through the half-open door, and then pausing, took a deliberate survey of the company, allowing his eyes to linger contentedly on the charms of the fair Rose, but not honoring his venerable parent with even the most cursory glance.

"What do you want?" inquired Valnoir.

"I want to tell you a story."

"How dare you, you young scoundrel!" cried the furious hunchback.

"I'm not talking to you."✓

Taupier sprung up to punish the lad for his insolence, but the *gamin* immediately prepared for fight, spreading his feet wide apart, bending his knees and clinching his fists, for young Bourignard had given much attention to the manly art of self-defense, and considered himself a match for almost anybody.

The scene was becoming ridiculous, and Mlle. de Charmière thought it quite time to put an end to it.

"Let the boy explain, Taupier," she said in the tone of

authority she knew so well how to assume when necessary.

• “He has some important information for us, perhaps.”

• “Upon what subject? On the playing of balls and tops?” sneered the hunchback, shrugging his shoulders.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” drawled the urchin.

“Now, my little friend,” said Rose, gently, for her feminine instinct warned her that some valuable information was to be derived from this most unpromising source, “what have you to tell us?”

“Something that interests you much more than it does me.”

“Tell us at once, then, for these gentlemen and myself are very busy.”

“I’ll tell you, but I want to be paid for it.”

“Well, Bourignard, I must say that your heir-presumptive has plenty of assurance!” exclaimed Valnoir.

“Indeed,” said Rose, smiling, “is it so very important?”

“What would you give to know just what happened on the Rue de Laval the other night?” demanded the *gamin* with unblushing effrontery.

This question wrought an instantaneous change in the expression of every face.

Valnoir turned pale, Taupier made a horrible grimace, and Bourignard lifted his hands to heaven as if to express the admiration his son’s shrewdness awakened in his breast.

Mlle. de Charmière was the only person present who retained sufficient presence of mind to continue the examination.

“Were you there, my child?” she inquired, with an air of almost maternal interest.

“I’ll tell you when I know what you’re willing to give me,” replied Agricola, unflinchingly.

“A louis. That surely is enough to spend on cakes,” insinuated Rose, drawing an elegant *porte-monnaie* from her pocket.

"I don't want any cakes. They've been making them of horse fat ever since the siege began."

"Some candy, then."

"Oh, I don't want any candy. I owe some fellows a lot of money on some games of billiards, and I want enough more to go on a little spree with. If you'll say three louis I'm your man."

"Here they are, my little friend," replied the lady, who never spared money in an emergency.

Agricola snatched the coins from Mlle. de Charmière's daintily gloved fingers, slipped them into his shoe, and then assumed an oratorical attitude.

"Do you want to know who put an end to Father Frapillon?" he began.

"You have just been paid to tell us," replied Taupier, brusquely.

"That's so. Well, it was Pilevert."

"Antoine! Impossible!" exclaimed Mlle. de Charmière, appalled at the prospect of being called as a witness before the court that would try her unfortunate brother.

"I think it is very probable," muttered the hunchback.

"Now, I'll tell you the whole story, if you want to hear it," continued the young rascal, with a satanic leer.

"You see, I was running down the Rue Montorgueil last Saturday afternoon about six o'clock, and who should I meet but Father Frapillon and old Pilevert walking along arm in arm as sweet as you please. I thought it very strange that an aristocrat like Frapillon should show himself in such company, so I followed them just to see what they were up to—"

"Not a bad idea, that," growled Taupier.

"Well, I saw them go into Baratte's, and I said to myself if old spectacles intends to treat Pilevert, it certainly isn't just for the pleasure of seeing him drink."

"Precocious child!" murmured Bourignard.

"Oh, hush up, pap! Well, they stayed and stayed, and

if I hadn't met Alfred Cramouzot who played four or five games of cards with me, I should have given up the thing as a bad job. At last they came out and went to the meeting on the Boulevard de Clichy, and afterward to your 'Full Moon,' which they left in a hurry, I can tell you," he added, with a chuckle.

"And I'll bet that you were the young imp that imitated the voice of a policeman on the stairs."

"Well, I shouldn't wonder if I was!" responded the urchin, insolently. "I'm not a bad hand at imitating, am I, pap?"

"Agricola, this facetiousness is becoming intolerable," said the *conciierge*, who had not yet entirely recovered from his fright.

"Attention, now. We're coming to the fifth act. On leaving the cellar, I saw that they started in the direction of the Rue de Laval, and I knew just as well as I wanted to, that they were making for the cottage, and so they were. They crept cautiously along in the shadow of the houses, but when they reached the little gate in the wall, in they went. As they shut the gate behind them, I couldn't get in, but had to stay outside, where I amused myself by whistling and by pounding on the gate. After awhile I saw a man and woman coming down the street, so I ran and hid behind a tree-box. They, too, stopped in front of the gate, and opened it without any trouble. After they went inside I ran up to the gate again to listen, and in a few minutes I heard voices. There seemed to be a pretty lively quarrel going on, and in a minute or two I heard the report of a pistol."

"But how do you know that it was Pilevert who fired it, idiot?" cried the hunchback.

"Wait a minute, will you? Don't be in such a hurry. Of course, after that I ran back to my tree-box and waited to see what would happen next; and in about twenty minutes the gate opened very softly, and Pilevert came out with

old Frapillon on his back, and laid him on the sidewalk. I don't know whether it was because he was scared or because he felt so bad about it, but his legs shook under him, and I really thought he was going to topple over. After he laid the body down, he noticed that he had forgotten the pistol, so he went back and got it, and placed it beside old spectacles."

"And what happened after that?" faltered Mlle. de Charmière.

The gate opened again a few minutes afterward, and this time four persons came out and started off in the direction of the Avenue Trudaine."

"Two of them were women, probably," said Valnoir.

"No, only one of them, the same one that had entered the garden with the man some time before. Then there was Pilevert, and another man, a tall fellow who looked funny enough, in a long cloak with a hood to it."

"Why didn't you follow them, idiot?" demanded Taupier, savagely.

"I'll bet you wouldn't have done it, you old blower," responded Agricola, insolently. "If I'd been fool enough to follow them they would have seized me and left me dead upon the pavement like old spectacles."

"And this is all you know about the affair?" inquired Valnoir, after a moment's silence.

"Yes."

And Agricola executed a pironette by way of conclusion, apparently well satisfied that he had earned his money.

"But why didn't you come and tell us sooner?"

"Why, because as I was making for home, by way of the Rue Breda, the patrol picked me up, and when they released me I thought I'd pay a visit to Bondy and make a raid on a potato patch."

"I think I heard some one at the door; I'll go and see," remarked Bourignard, who seemed considerably upset by his son's revelations, and Agricola followed him.

After the departure of Bourignard and his hopeful son, there was a long silence. Taupier was the first to break it.

“Well, we seem to be well rid of these people, that’s one comfort,” he remarked, carelessly.

“How so?” inquired Valnoir, who seemed much less confident.

“Why, they seem to have a nice little murder upon their consciences, and if they attempt to trouble us, I think we sha’n’t have much trouble in silencing them.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” replied the editor-in-chief. “It is very evident that Frapillon was killed by Pilevert, but how and why, I fail to understand.”

“Besides,” interrupted Mlle. de Charmière, “Antoine—I—I mean that man never seemed to me at all blood-thirsty, and I really don’t believe that he would have dared to kill anybody.”

“But you can hardly doubt it now, it seems to me. You heard what that young rascal said.”

“Yes, but he could not see what occurred on the other side of the wall, and the shot may have been fired by one of the men who were with Pilevert when he left the garden.”

“It makes little or no difference whether the murder was committed by Pilevert or some other member of the party. The fact places them all in our power.”

“It seems to me that we are wasting a great deal of time, gentlemen,” said Rose. “What we want to know is what Frapillon has done with the money. Don’t forget that. What kind of a man is this Molinchart?”

“Oh, a two-penny sort of a doctor that Frapillon has been making a cat’s-paw of, and that would sell his soul for a little money.”

“Isn’t he the proprietor of a private hospital? It seems to me I saw a notice to that effect in one of our papers,” remarked Valnoir.

“Yes. Frapillon furnished the capital, and had a share

in the profits." The establishment is in Montmartre; and Molinchard has the assurance to style it the Villa on the Heights."

"And now I think of it, I have an excellent excuse for visiting the establishment!" exclaimed Taupier.

"What?"

"Podensac was wounded in the arm the other day by a bullet, and he went to Molinchard to get cured."

"Have you any objection to taking me with you when you go?" inquired Rose, hastily.

"Not the slightest, though I don't see the use of it."

"A woman sees many things that escape a man's notice, and I feel sure that I should get at the truth after I had talked with those people awhile. Our campaign against the Saint Seniers has not prospered very well thus far, but that is because it has been badly conducted. I am going to assume command of it now, and see if we don't come off victorious this time."

"So be it," said the hunchback, picking up his hat. "I think I'll step out and see how the paper is selling to-day at the news-stands." And he departed after imprinting a kiss on the hand of the fair Rose, who submitted without any show of repugnance, for she had a plan, and hoped to secure the hunchback's assistance in executing it.

CHAPTER XXII.

DOCTOR MOLINCHARD was seated at his desk, looking over his accounts in a damp and gloomy basement room which he dignified with the name of superintendent's office. His sallow countenance had assumed an expression of complacency, which it did not wear in J. B. Frapillon's time, for the sudden and violent death of that gentleman had wrought a great change in the physician's existence. For the first time in his life, Molinchard found himself

free to act as he pleased, and absolute master of an establishment in which he had heretofore occupied only the humble position of steward.

No one knew for a certainty that Frapillon owned an interest in the establishment, for the diplomatist of the Rue de Cadet rarely took any one into his confidence in business matters; besides, as Frapillon had no relatives in the city, and as it would be necessary to wait until the siege was ended before any relatives he might have in the country could be apprised of his untimely demise, the doctor was sure to have no trouble with any possible heirs for a long time, and this prospect was eminently pleasing to him.

During the night that followed the ladies' departure from the cottage, Frapillon had explained a part of his plan to his accomplice, and had alluded vaguely to an enormous inheritance that might be secured by constituting themselves the guardians of an old and almost dying woman and a young girl whose mind was affected.

Molinchard had asked for no further particulars at the time. He never questioned the orders given him by his superior officer, but executed them with scrupulous fidelity, and it was in compliance with these orders that Mme. de Muire had been enticed from her chamber on some specious pretext, and then imprisoned in an isolated room in the upper story of the adjoining building.

This maneuver had left Mlle. de Saint Senier exposed to the machinations of her persecutor, who had confined himself to robbing her of her keys, however, and the narcotic she had unwittingly taken had had no pernicious effect upon her health.

Such was the condition of affairs when Molinchard learned that the dead body of Frapillon had been picked up in the street by a policeman. He had intended to ask that gentleman for full instructions that very day, and the news of his death threw him into a state of the deepest perplexity.

We must, however, do the doctor the justice to say that

his first impulse had been to set the two unfortunate women at liberty immediately, but sharing the opinion of M. de Talleyrand, who declared that one should always distrust one's first impulse, because it is usually a good one, he began to consider the probable consequences of such a step, and finally concluded that the very first use they would make of their freedom would be to denounce him.

Little as he knew about Frapillon's plans, he would certainly be regarded as an accomplice, and the mere thought of being called to an account by the authorities was appalling to him.

The first and second days of the ladies' imprisonment were therefore days of dire perplexity for their jailer and of unspeakable anguish for them.

The Countess de Muire had had another terrible nervous attack, and did not leave her bed, where she lay weeping and calling for her niece.

The doctor had intrusted her to the care of the virago that served as nurse in the establishment, and confined his medical attentions to prescribing soothing draughts.

Renée de Saint Senier had received several visits from him, and during these interviews the astute Molinchard had manifested a prudent reserve, saying little, scarcely answering the questions put to him, but listening with carefully concealed eagerness to the young girl's complaints and reproaches.

It was evident to Mlle. de Saint Senier that this highly discreet physician considered, or pretended to consider her insane, and this discovery plunged her into the depths of despair.

As for the doctor, he had sense enough to feel sure that he had two ladies of rank in his power—the victims of a conspiracy that he only partially understood.

And once convinced of this fact, he said to himself that he might still get safely out of the scrape by siding with the victims.

He had only to pretend that he had been deceived in regard to their real condition and release them to win the gratitude of these persons of distinction—an advantage the doctor did not disdain by any means. It is even probable that he would have come to this sage conclusion if the strangest thing imaginable had not happened.

Molinchard had fallen in love with Renée de Saint Senier.

He had struggled hard against the infatuation, had vainly reminded himself of his long-cherished convictions as a liberal and a philosopher, but had succumbed in spite of himself to the aristocratic charms of Mlle. de Saint Senier.

The conquests of his youth had not extended beyond the *habitués* of the beer-shops in the Latin Quarter and the women servants in the hospitals, but this made him all the more susceptible to the charms of a young girl who belonged to a sphere from which quacks of his stamp are rigorously excluded.

The unfortunate quadragenarian could deceive himself no longer. He loved, but dared not tell his love. He knew that he was very unattractive in person, and that his unpolished manners would not be likely to win him the favor of a beautiful young lady of noble birth, but he could not make up his mind to part with his prisoner, and he was beginning to entertain strong hopes of a new revolution that would afford him an opportunity to appear in the light of a preserver and benefactor.

The recollection of sundry proconsuls of 1793, who allowed their victims to choose between their love and the guillotine, haunted Molinchard and gave him some hope.

Still, nearly three weeks had elapsed since Frapillon's death had made him master of the Villa on the Heights, and he had made no progress whatever.

The siege was fast drawing to a close, for the stock of provisions was now known to be nearly exhausted, and the doctor could see little prospect of a fortunate termination of his love-affair.

Consequently, he had become rather despondent; and though seated at his desk, ostensibly engaged in looking over his accounts, he was really paying very little attention to the figures before him, when the big ex-cantinière who acted as nurse for the female patients burst into the room like a whirlwind.

"There's some people asking for you, m'sieur," she said, breathlessly.

"Very well, Mother Ponisse, very well," replied Molincharde; "but you need not speak so loud."

"I can't help it. It's my natural voice," replied the virago, raising the organ to a still higher key.

"What do they want?" inquired the doctor, who seemed considerably annoyed at the interruption.

"They didn't tell me; but you'd better see them, for they seem to be very stylish people. There's one gentleman with a fur-trimmed overcoat, who looks like an English nobleman, and a princess in furs and velvets—"

"What, a lady?" inquired Molincharde, who was beginning to feel curious, and even a little anxious.

"Certainly there is a lady, and a dwarf, into the bargain; and they didn't come afoot, but in a fine carriage that is waiting for them at the foot of the hill."

"Very well; I will see them. Show them in at once."

The old woman started off growling, but she was spared any further trouble, for before she reached the door it opened, and the visitors appeared upon the threshold.

Taupier came first, closely followed by Valnoir, who had Mlle. de Charpière on his arm.

"Good-morning," cried the hunchback. "I think your business must be prospering by the length of time you keep us waiting. Allow me, most learned Æsculapius, to present some friends of mine."

Molincharde, who had risen to his feet, bowed so awkwardly that Rose could hardly restrain her desire to laugh.

"You see in this gorgeous dressing-gown," continued the

pitiless Taupier, "a prince of science who has retired to the heights of Montmartre to consecrate his skill to the alleviation of human ills. His talents are well known, and his name—"

"You must excuse our friend's levity, monsieur," interrupted Valnoir, pitying the doctor's embarrassment. "I will introduce myself. I am the editor-in-chief of the 'Serpenteau,' and you may have heard of me through—"

"Through poor Frapillon, certainly," stammered Molinchard; "and I am delighted—"

"And this is Mademoiselle de Charmière," cried the hunchback. "Confess, doctor, that you never saw a prettier woman. She is Valnoir's *Ægeria*, the angel of the 'Serpenteau'—"

Rose checked him by beginning to speak in her turn.

"I was anxious to see the magnificent view you must have from your house," she said, with one of her most bewitching smiles; "and I hope, sir, that you will not be offended with me for accompanying Monsieur de Valnoir."

"Quite the contrary, madame—I mean mademoiselle," replied the doctor, who was becoming more and more awkward in his manner.

"We heard that Podensac was here," remarked Taupier, "so we thought we would pay him a friendly call, as he might need cheering up a little."

"Of course, of course. Is he in his room?" asked Molinchard, turning to the ex-cantinière, who was still standing near the door with arms akimbo.

"No; he's smoking his pipe in the main court-yard," replied the old woman.

"Then I will escort you there, gentlemen," said the physician; "and madame, too, if she is not afraid of a little tobacco-smoke."

"Oh, not the least bit in the world, particularly in the open air," replied Rose.

"Then lead the way," interrupted Taupier.

Molinchard needed no urging, but immediately conducted his guests down a long corridor at the further end of which was an iron grating that served as an entrance to the place the servant had styled the main court-yard.

Seated on a bench in one corner of this court-yard, was Podensac, tranquilly smoking a pipe, with his arm in a sling.

He rose on perceiving Taupier, and advanced to meet the brilliant company that had so unexpectedly honored him with a visit.

He had been on tolerably friendly terms with Valnoir prior to the duel at Saint Germain, and he knew Mlle. de Charmière by sight, so the meeting was cordial on both sides. Rose apologized very gracefully for the liberty she had taken, and this time her apology was received with the utmost politeness, for Podensac prided himself on his gallantry; besides, he was not sorry to have an opportunity to pose as a wounded warrior before a pretty woman.

"Well, old fellow, those rascally Prussians were rather too much for you last time," said the hunchback.

"Oh, my wound is a mere scratch, and I hope to get back to the outposts in a few days."

"And in the meantime you come to Molinchard's to recuperate. As soon as we learned that you were here, we resolved to come and pay you a visit."

"I am very grateful to you, and especially to madame, for having taken the trouble to climb up here. It is a real pilgrimage."

"I did not mind it in the least, monsieur," said Rose, graciously. "Indeed, I would go much further to see a brave officer and a friend of Monsieur de Valnoir."

Molinchard thought he could leave the party to continue their complimentary but very commonplace conversation with perfect safety, so he took advantage of this opportunity to excuse himself, for he did not like to be long absent from the house where he had a host of things to attend to.

"Do you know, old fellow, that it is a positive age since I saw you," remarked Taupier.

"Yes; it is nearly three months since our meeting in Mouchabeuf's wine-shop at Rueil."

Taupier started slightly, for the recollection was not very pleasant to him.

"And, by the way, I have a droll story to tell you," continued the major. "Would you believe it—"

He was interrupted by the falling of a stone that dropped so near them that it grazed Mlle. de Charmière's dress.

"You are not hurt, mademoiselle, I trust?" exclaimed the major.

"Look! there seems to be a bit of paper tied around the pebble," remarked Taupier.

"That is certainly very strange!"

"Let us see what is on the paper," growled the hunchback.

"But letters that are thrown over walls are generally love-letters," objected Rose, with a smiling glance at Podensac, "and I think you gentlemen are really too inquisitive."

"Oh, I have no correspondence of that nature, I assure you."

"Then we can read it, I suppose?"

"Certainly, as I haven't the slightest idea where it came from."

The hunchback lost no time in removing the paper which had been tied around the stone with a coarse thread.

"The deuce! it's not very legible," he muttered, as he unfolded it. "It looks as if it had been written with a nail dipped in lamp-black."

"Whoever you may be," he read aloud, as he slowly deciphered it, "'take pity on a woman who was enticed into this house by the foulest treachery, and who is now forcibly detained here.'"

"Whew! this looks serious.

"I therefore implore the person who reads these lines to take them to a magistrate, and tell him what a gross violation of the law is being committed here."

"Let us hear the rest of it!" exclaimed Mlle. de Charmière, who seemed to be greatly interested.

"That is all," replied the hunchback.

"Who can the writer be?"

"A poor girl who seems to have a perfect mania for writing notes of this kind. She has bombarded me several times before with her notes, tied around pebbles, that she throws from the adjoining yard, in which she takes her exercise. I showed the notes to the doctor, and he told me the poor girl's story. She is the daughter of a cabinet-maker or a locksmith, I don't remember which; and she was about to be married when the war broke out. Her intended was obliged to go when the reserve was called for, and she has heard nothing from him since the battle of Sedan. Her grief and suspense have impaired her reason to such an extent that her father has been obliged to bring her here."

"How touching!" exclaimed Mlle. de Charmière. "And the poor thing is here—alone, and deserted by all her kith and kin."

"Her father, who drinks, I believe, is only too glad to get rid of her, I judge, from what the doctor says."

"And you have felt no curiosity to see her?"

"No; I understand she becomes very violent in the presence of strangers. It is a peculiarity of her disease that she fancies herself terribly persecuted by the people here in the house—fancies they are trying to separate her from her betrothed, and all that."

"Is she young?" inquired Rose, after a short silence.

"I believe so, but not at all pretty, Molinchard tells me."

"That explains why you haven't insisted upon paying her a visit, for we all know that you are a great ladies' man," sneered Taupier.

"Not nearly as much as you are yourself, my dear fellow," replied Podensac modestly. "And, by the way, I ought to inquire about one of your sweethearts whom you must have seen quite recently, I suppose."

"I've no idea who you're talking about," responded the hunchback, curtly, shrugging his shoulders.

"You're a sly dog, and—"

"Gentlemen," interposed Mlle. de Charmière, who took very little interest in Taupier's conquests, "I have no desire to intrude upon your confidence, so I am going to ask Monsieur de Valnoir to take me to the doctor so I can ask his permission to visit this poor recluse."

Had Rose understood Podensac's allusion she certainly would not have thought of leaving them, but she had not the slightest suspicion of the truth; and though the woman's instinct told her that an interesting mystery was concealed under this rather commonplace story of the doctor, she saw no possible connection between it and the managers of the "Serpenteau."

"If you tarry too long we shall rejoin you," cried Podensac, as Valnoir and his fair companion turned toward the house.

Even the shrewd hunchback had failed to understand the covert meaning of the officer's allusion, for his thoughts were elsewhere, and when he found himself alone with the wounded man he thought only of extorting the much-desired information from him.

"Do you know that it's a long time since we met?" he remarked, striking the major a friendly blow on the shoulder.

"That is true; but you look none the worse for it. In fact, the siege seems to agree with you."

"Yes, yes," answered Taupier complacently. "When

a paper has a circulation like ours, its owners have reason to feel pretty comfortable."

"You fellows are certainly to be envied. That duel at Saint Germain seems to have brought you good luck."

"That's a fact," responded the hunchback, eagerly seizing his opportunity. "By the way, that's a matter I want to speak to you about, for I've never had any chance to talk with you since that eventful day. Tell me what happened to you while you were returning to Paris in the acrobat's wagon."

"Why, you know just as well as I do."

"Upon my word I do not. Pilevert is such a blockhead that I have never succeeded in getting any satisfactory account of your adventures out of him."

"That is very possible," responded the major with a laugh, "and there are good reasons why our other companion should not be very talkative. Well, we came very near being captured by the Uhlans, who followed us almost to Rueil, where I parted company with the other occupants of the wagon in order to rejoin my men."

"But how about the dead man?" asked the hunchback, not without a certain hesitation of manner, for in spite of his cynicism, the recollection was always an unpleasant one to him.

"The dead man was still living when I left him in his cousin's care."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Tanpier, turning pale.

"But he was nearly dead. He couldn't have lived long enough to reach Paris."

"Who knows?" muttered the hunchback.

"This reminds me that I entirely forgot, the other night, to inquire about the health—"

"Of whom?"

"Oh, you needn't think that I'm deceived by your innocent airs, or that I've forgotten our meeting in Moucha-beuf's establishment."

"In Mouchabeuf's establishment? Well; what of it?"

Taupier's voice trembled a little; he was afraid to understand.

"Yes; and the little deaf-and-dumb girl. Get out, you rascal! She certainly is pretty enough for you to feel glad to see her again!"

"See her again!" said the hunchback, springing from the bench.

"Don't feign ignorance. You know very well that she escaped from those Prussians that carried her away, and you have had plenty of time to see her again since her return to Paris."

Taupier gazed at the speaker in mingled astonishment and dismay.

"And between you and me, you owe me a nice breakfast, which you must pay after the siege, for I contributed not a little to the return of your Dulcinia."

"But how did you happen to see her, and where, and when?"

"So, you persist until the last. Well, then, I was at Bezons when she arrived there in company with a messenger from the Army of the Loire, and an army officer of your acquaintance."

"Who?"

"Why, Saint Senier's cousin—the fellow who served as a second at the duel. But now I think of it, perhaps he has supplanted you, and that is the reason you haven't seen the girl since her return."

And Podensac burst into a loud laugh that made Taupier clench his fist in impotent rage.

"What did you do with them? Where are they?" he cried, frantically.

"You ask me too much, old fellow. I sent them to the provost-marshal. If you want any further information you would do well to apply to the governor."

"So it was they!" exclaimed Taupier, recollecting the

report one of the National Guards had rendered at the meeting of the "Full Moon," and Agricola's story.

Just as this exclamation escaped the lips of the unfortunate lurchback, Valnoir and Mlle. de Charmière reappeared at the grating.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE morning had been an exceedingly uncomfortable and anxious one to Molinhard.

After the alarm caused by the unexpected advent of Taupier and his party there followed a period of comparative tranquillity on finding that this visit might be accounted for by a desire to see his patient, Podensac; and the beginning of the conversation in the court-yard was so reassuring that he thought he could leave the party with perfect safety.

He felt, too, that such a course was decidedly wisest under the circumstances, as it would indicate that he was the possessor of an untroubled conscience.

This, however, was not the principal motive that impelled him to return to his office.

The unfortunate doctor was in a position similar to that of the hero in one of Edgar Allan Poe's novels, who had concealed the body of his murdered wife under the floor of his sleeping apartment, and who dared not leave it on that account.

It is true that Molinhard was guarding no lifeless body, but his terror was none the less keen, for two prisoners were a heavy burden upon his conscience and his love for Renée only increased his torture.

He hardly dared to set foot out of the house now for fear some accident might happen in his absence, though every precaution had been taken to prevent it.

Mme. de Muire, who was a prisoner in the topmost story, and unable to leave her bed, certainly could not make her

escape, as no one except the nurse ever ascended the staircase leading to the lady's room, and she being bound to the doctor by ties of gratitude, was not likely to listen to any appeals that the patient might make to her.

Before Mother Ponisse had accepted her present position in the doctor's establishment she had been the proprietor of a small drinking saloon in Montmartre, where she engaged, one evening, in a pugilistic encounter with one of her patrons and nearly killed him. Molinchart had attended the wounded man for nothing, and saved the virago from the penitentiary; and now her fists and her eyes were alike at the service of her employer whom she served with dog-like fidelity. .

The doctor depended solely upon this female Cerberus to frustrate any attempt to escape on the part of his two prisoners; but he had been unwilling to subject Renée to the humiliation of her direct surveillance.

Mother Ponisse entered Mlle. de Saint Senier's apartments only to put them in order, and had received instructions to answer no questions the young lady might address to her.

After taking leave of his visitors, he returned to his office where Mother Ponisse was in waiting to inform him that all was quiet in the department intrusted to her charge; and he was beginning to hope that he should soon be rid of his troublesome guests when, to his surprise, Valnoir and Mlle. Charmière re-entered the office.

"We have come to ask a favor, monsieur," said Rose with her most irresistible smile. "You will not take offense, I trust?"

"Not at all, not at all," stammered Molinchart.

"Monsieur de Valnoir is trying to persuade me that I am indiscreet, but I am going to make the venture."

"You are quite right; and I shall be delighted—"

"To oblige me. I was sure of it. Besides, I warn you that if you refuse I shall be very angry with you."

"But I have no intention of refusing your request; that is—unless—unless you ask impossibilities."

"Take care, doctor," said Mlle. de Charmière, "your response is rather Jesuitical."

"But I can not promise without knowing—"

"But you must know, doctor, that we women do not recognize the existence of impossibilities, and that I shall accept no excuse."

"But will you be kind enough to tell me, mademoiselle—"

"Ah, well, I want to go through your establishment and talk with your patients."

The doctor sprung up and turned pale at the same instant; indeed, he could hardly summon up strength to murmur:

"Impossible!"

"Oh, doctor, doctor, I thought better of you than that," said Rose, playfully shaking her finger at him.

"But I assure you, mademoiselle, that such a visit would have no interest for you. My patients are all poor and common people, many of them afflicted with very loathsome diseases, and the sight—"

"Is one to which I am not unaccustomed," interrupted Mlle. de Charmière. "I have been acting as assistant nurse in a hospital for more than a month."

"You might as well yield, doctor," said Valnoir. "You know there is no such thing as successfully contending with a pretty woman's caprice."

The first moment of alarm over, Molinhard began to wonder if Mlle. de Charmière meant mischief in asking to go through the house, or if the request was simply the result of a whim, and to say to himself that it would perhaps be better to yield to this caprice and take the lady through the rooms occupied by the ordinary patients.

"Ah, well, mademoiselle, as you insist, I am ready to act as your guide," said he after a short silence.

"Good! good!" exclaimed Rose, gayly. "I knew you were a charming man. Come, are you ready?" she added, springing up like a child impatient to be off.

"I warn you that you will have any number of stairs to climb," said the doctor, now thoroughly reassured.

"And I warn you that I intend to see everything. To begin with, you must show me the insane girl."

The last two words fell upon Molinchart like a thunderbolt, and he recoiled a step or two in positive terror.

"The insane girl!" he repeated, with a bewildered air.

"Yes, the girl who has lost her betrothed. I adore love stories, so you can understand my anxiety to see the victim of an all-absorbing passion. They are so rare in these days."

The unfortunate doctor literally did not know which way to turn, and in his agitation, he forgot all about the romantic story he had told to Podensac, and began to deny the presence of any such person in his establishment.

"I assure you, mademoiselle, that we treat no mental maladies here," he said, in a voice that trembled perceptibly; "and that I know nothing whatever of any such person as you describe."

"Really, this is a little too good!" cried Rose, clapping her gloved hands jubilantly. "By your manner, doctor, one would be strongly tempted to believe that you are in love with your patient, and aspire to take her lost lover's place."

Without suspecting it, Mlle. de Charmière had hit the nail exactly upon the head, and this time Molinchart was positively speechless with consternation.

"It is false!" he murmured, passing his hand across his forehead. "There is no such young girl here."

"Would you like to see her writing?" retorted Rose, tranquilly, handing him the note written by Renée.

She had slipped it under her glove after Taupier showed it to her in the court-yard, and now drew it from its hiding-place.

The unfortunate physician took the scrap of paper, glanced at it, and dropped his arms with a despairing gesture.

"Now, doctor, my good doctor, my dear doctor," simpered Mlle. de Charmière, "now that it is useless for you to try to keep your secret any longer, let me see this poor girl. I am sure she is lovely."

The very imminence of the danger restored Molinchart's presence of mind, in a measure at least.

"Ah, well, mademoiselle," he replied, assuming an air of wounded dignity, "as you insist so much I am obliged to tell you that this young girl was intrusted to my care by her father, and that I have medical reasons for not allowing her to see any visitors. The presence of any stranger always brings on terrible nervous spasms, and I should fail in my duty as a physician if I yielded to a request that can be prompted only by idle curiosity."

This rather disconcerting rebuff produced no effect upon Mlle. de Charmière, however; on the contrary, she looked Molinchart full in the face, and said with a smile that certainly meant mischief:

"Curiosity is a good thing sometimes, doctor."

Molinchart was vainly endeavoring to find a reply when the Pouissee, who seemed to be in the habit of appearing at critical moments, opened the door a few inches, and cried:

"Come, doctor, come quick. Number 8 is dying."

"Excuse me," cried the doctor, rushing out of the office.

This hasty departure put an end to the conversation, and of course upset all Mlle. de Charmière's plans. She deliberated for a moment whether she should wait for the doctor's return or content herself for the present with what she had just learned.

Valnoir insisted that they should leave it at once. The whole visit was most distasteful to him, and as he suspected no other mystery in the establishment than that of the

securities deposited there by the deceased treasurer of the "Moon with the Teeth," he concluded to allow Taupier to try to secure possession of them without any assistance from him, and the pair finally decided to rejoin their friends in the court-yard.

They reached it just as Taupier learned of the return of Regina and Roger de Saint Senier, and as this appalling intelligence made him desire to return home as soon as possible in order to make some arrangements for averting the danger that threatened them, he made the reappearance of Valnoir and his companion an excuse for taking leave of the major, whose conversation had ceased to interest him now he had learned all he wished to know.

As Rose approached he stepped up near enough to her to say in a low tone:

"I have just heard an important piece of news."

"And I have found a new clew," replied the lady, in the same tone.

This was no place to inform each other of the result of their investigations, and both were evidently anxious to terminate the visit.

Podensac exerted all his fascinations to detain the fair Rose, but in vain. He was obliged to content himself with the graciously accorded permission to call and thank her in person at her house on the Place de la Madeleine as soon as he had entirely recovered.

One thing struck Mlle. de Charmière very forcibly on her departure. The front door was open, and no one seemed to be in attendance upon it, and this fact certainly indicated an unusual confusion and disorder in the household, for this establishment was generally guarded like a prison, and no one could either enter or leave it without the knowledge of the ex-cantinière.

But the attention of Mother Ponisse was engrossed by other and graver matters just at that time. The news she had brought her master in the midst of his conversation

with Mlle. de Charmière was sufficient explanation of her absence, for No. 8 was no other than the unfortunate Countess de Muire. Molinchart understood which patient was meant instantly, and rushed out of the office without troubling himself any further about his visitors.

“My desk is locked, and Valnoir is not the man to break open other persons’ drawers,” he thought, as he hurried upstairs.

Mother Ponisse followed him, puffing and blowing like a porpoise.

“What is the matter with her?” asked the doctor, anxiously.

“Another of those attacks. Her limbs suddenly became rigid, then her eyes rolled back in her head, and she called for the other woman—the young one.”

It did not take Molinchart more than a minute to reach the upper story and throw open the door of No. 8, which had served as a prison for the poor countess. On an iron bedstead, hung with calico curtains like the beds of a hospital, lay the form of Mme. de Muire. Her face was wax-like in its pallor, and her emaciated form was distinctly visible under the thin coverlid.

Molinchart cleared the space between the door and the bed with a single bound, and seizing the hand of the sick woman began to feel her pulse. At the same time he scrutinized the face on which death had already set its seal.

There were a few faint pulsations, then the circulation stopped entirely.

Her eyes became glassy, and her mouth opened convulsively to utter a name—the name of Renée.

But the voice died away in the throat of the dying woman.

Molinchart let go his hold upon her arm, and it fell heavily upon the bed.

“She is dead!” he murmured.

Just as he uttered these words Mother Ponisse entered

the room, her obesity having retarded her progress very considerably; and it was in a panting voice that she asked, cynically:

"Well, how is the old woman?"

"It is all over. Hush!" said the doctor.

"Well, it's no great loss," growled the virago. "She gave me more trouble than all the rest of the patients put together."

Molinchard made no reply to this unfeeling speech.

He was holding a small mirror to the lips of the countess, and he soon perceived that no moisture dimmed the shining surface of the glass.

After this test was concluded he dropped into a chair, the picture of consternation.

The former cantinière was not in the habit of seeing him display so much emotion in the presence of death, and thought it advisable to remind him of the requirements of the situation.

"I had better go for an undertaker, hadn't I?" she asked, in the same tone in which she would have suggested preparing dinner.

The doctor started like a man suddenly awakened from a dream.

"I forbid you to do anything of the kind," he said, dryly.

"What do you intend to do with the body? This isn't a public hospital, and you're not going to dissect her."

"Silence!" cried Molinchard. "I will go to the mayor's office myself."

"Very well, very well! I'm not anxious to go to Montmartre, I assure you."

"Go down and tell that lady and gentleman that I am with a patient, and that they must excuse me," said Molinchard.

"I'm going," replied the old woman, sulkily.

"But not a word to them about what has occurred here," added the doctor, quickly.

"It isn't worth while to tell me that," growled Mother Ponisse. "I know my business."

And she went out banging the door behind her without any of the care usually observed in chambers of death.

Molinchard, on being left alone, became a prey to thoughts that were by no means cheerful in their nature. This was not due to an excessive sensibility on his part, however, for the practice of his profession had long since accustomed him to death and its lugubrious accessories. Nor was it that he took such a deep interest in the victim of his friend Frapillon's infamous machinations, but because this death was an event which he had not anticipated, and which might be productive of the gravest consequences.

In the first place it compelled him to publicly admit Mme. de Muire's presence in his house. One can immure a living being, but one can not conceal a dead person. But unfortunate as this was, it troubled him much less than the effect this terrible news was likely to produce upon his other prisoner. He could conceal her aunt's death from the unfortunate Renée for awhile, but the day would surely come when further concealment would be impossible.

In view of the absurd hope of winning the young girl's favor that Molinchard still entertained, this event was especially unfortunate, for how could he hope that his dreams would be realized when the remembrance of the unfortunate countess must ever stand between Renée and himself?

On the other hand, how was he to tell Mlle. de Saint Sepier that she had just lost her second mother, and that he had not even allowed her to give her a farewell kiss.

"Still she is now alone in the world," he murmured, thinking of the poor captive. "Who knows but she might accept me as a protector under such circumstances? I am going to tell her all."

And having come to this decision he left the room, taking care to double lock the door and carry the key away with him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SINCE a fatal imprudence had placed her in Frapillon's power Renée de Saint Senier's life had been one of intolerable torture.

That first day of captivity in which her aunt had been torn from her was followed by long hours of frantic despair.

When she woke from the deep sleep into which the opiate had plunged her her first thought had been of the absent ones.

What had become of the loved ones for whose sake she had endured privations and dangers of every kind for more than a month?

Roger was the inmate of a Prussian prison, and her second mother, whose sympathy and fortitude had been a never-failing support in the time of adversity, had in turn become a victim to the sort of fatality that seemed to pursue all who bore the name of Saint Senier.

In vain she explored every nook and corner of the suite of apartments in which she had been incarcerated, opened every article of furniture, and examined every drawer, not the slightest clew could she find.

Mme. de Muire had suddenly disappeared without leaving any trace of her presence or of her departure.

Frapillon, to her great astonishment, had not visited her again, so the resolve with which she had armed herself against her persecution was not put to the test; and during the early days of her captivity the solitude that followed her short interview with the pretended physician was not the least of her troubles.

Her energy dwindled away for want of an opportunity to exercise it in a struggle with her odious persecutor, and she even began to long to find herself face to face with her

perfidious adversary rather than be obliged to endure this uncertainty any longer.

She overcame her disgust sufficiently to address a few questions to the repulsive automaton who seemed to have charge of the rooms, but these questions elicited only evasive responses and coarse remarks; besides, Mother Ponisse generally managed to perform her duties while Renée was asleep, so not unfrequently several days elapsed without the poor captive catching even a glimpse of this assistant jailer.

Soon, she ceased to notice either the presence or absence of this unscrupulous servant, and to consider her as a kind of unfeeling and inflexible automaton.

Her life passed almost as if she had been a prisoner in the castle of the Sleeping Beauty. The long, monotonous days dragged slowly by, followed by anxious and sleepless nights, and she spent hour after hour seated in her arm-chair with her head thrown back, her eyes closed, and her hands clasped.

Benumbed by the torpor of despair, she sometimes lost the power to think, but when she woke from this lethargy she tried to shake off the despondency that weighed her down and to regain a little of her old energy.

Her only diversion consisted in wandering about the neglected garden connected with her prison, but she had had plenty of time to become familiar with every inch of the dreary ground. She had counted the stones in the wall, tried the strength of the low gate through which Frapillon had disappeared, and measured with her eye the height of the walls that surrounded her. She never ceased to realize the absolute impossibility of flight. To a frail and unsophisticated young girl this apparently innocent establishment was an invulnerable prison.

She did not even think of trying to make her escape, but began to take an interest in the plants which, like herself, were pining within these grim walls. A rose-tree that

was perishing for want of care and of sunlight became her favorite. She tended it with the zeal and passion that captivity inspires in the hearts of all prisoners; she knew the exact number of branches upon it, and carefully removed the frost that settled upon it every night.

Such were the occupations and diversions of the early part of her captivity, for the weather, which remained warm and dry, allowed a daily promenade in the garden. Then came days of rain and snow that kept her a prisoner in her apartments.

One morning, while she was sitting in front of the fire in the little drawing-room, a slight sound made her turn her head.

Dr. Molincharð was standing beside her arm-chair. He had merely dropped in a moment, he said, to inquire about her health, and ask if she desired anything.

This first interview proved a very stormy one, for Renée poured forth a torrent of the bitterest reproaches; but she did not succeed in making this man cast aside the gentle reserve in which he had intentionally enveloped himself. Prayers and reproaches alike proved unavailing.

Molincharð persisted in acting as if he were dealing with an unreasonable child who could only be managed with infinite care and tact; and the young girl, at last becoming exasperated beyond endurance, put an end to the conversation by fleeing into the garden.

The doctor did not intrude upon her again that day, but he returned the next day, and the day after, and every day.

On his third visit, Mlle. de Saint Senier understood the situation. She was considered insane, and she was treated accordingly.

It was the bitterest moment of her captivity.

After this discovery, she was unable to close her eyes for several nights, and this insomnia finally brought on a state of extraordinary nervous excitement.

She even began to wonder if she were not mistaken in

regard to her own mental condition, and if she had not really lost her reason.

It seemed to her sometimes that she was the victim of a dream or of an hallucination, and that her real life had ceased the evening she left the cottage. She dared not look in the glass for fear of seeing her features emaciated and her eyes glittering with fever.

But fortunately this crisis was of short duration. ●

After a few days of terrible mental suffering and indescribable anxiety Renée became mistress of herself once more.

Her sound judgment regained its ascendancy; her nerves became calm once more, and after carefully reviewing the circumstances of her abduction, she finally came to the conclusion that her enemies must be the same persons who had abducted Regina and Landreau.

As for Mme. de Muire, Renée, in spite of the doctor's evasive replies, did not doubt that she was pining in some cell in that horrible place.

So, without wearing herself out in vain conjectures, the young girl now concentrated all her energies upon the discovery of some means of escape.

To escape without assistance was an absolute impossibility, and she could hope for that only from outsiders or from other inmates of the house than she had seen, so she decided to resort to missives of a similar character to that Taupier had picked up.

She had no pen, ink, or letter-paper, so she had been obliged to use as a substitute a bit of charcoal and a scrap of paper in which the Ponisse had brought some butter. Moreover, the walls that surrounded her garden were very high, and more than once her strength did not prove equal to throwing her stone over this obstacle; but she had succeeded a number of times, and she had every reason to believe that all her letters were not lost, for she often heard a sound of voices on the other side of the wall, so as the

neighboring court-yard was occupied, there was a strong likelihood that the curious projectile had been picked up.

Still, she had never heard anything to confirm her in this belief. Even the doctor, though Podensac had shown him two or three of these notes, had not said a word to his prisoner about them, from which fact she erroneously concluded that he knew nothing at all about them.

She had too much good sense to think of such a thing as calling to any one, or screaming for help. Her words would not have been distinctly heard, and her cries would only have incited her jailers to redoubled vigilance.

On the day of Valnoir's visit she repeated her experiment, and while the arrival of her strange missive was agitating the persons on the other side of the wall, she was walking up and down the little garden dreaming of the possible consequences of this fresh attempt.

When she returned to the drawing-room she found Molinchart there, but this visit from the doctor caused her no surprise. She had become accustomed to these sudden appearances and disappearances, which had frightened her so much in the early part of her captivity. The girl knew, too, that he could enter by the door that opened into the little dining-room, though she had never seen him use it, for he had always taken advantage of a moment when her back was turned to disappear.

The maneuvers of her jailer interested Mlle. de Saint Senier very little, however. She had nothing to hope for from him, she felt sure; and her only object now was to rid herself of his unwelcome presence as soon as possible.

That day she felt especially anxious to be alone. Some secret presentiment told her that her missive had fallen into the hands of persons who would not ignore it this time; and it seemed to her that a change was about to be wrought in her destiny—that she was soon to be free.

She received Molinchart more coldly and ungraciously than ever; but this did not appear to disconcert him in the

least. He seemed less awkward and much more animated than usual; and Renée even noticed that his large eyes, which were generally so dull, glittered with remarkable brilliancy.

"How do you find yourself to-day, mademoiselle?" he inquired, in a voice that trembled a little.

"Very well, sir," replied Mlle. de Saint Senier, with a bitter smile. "I am surrounded with such jealous care here that it would be very ungrateful in me to complain."

"If I could feel sure that you were speaking seriously I should be happy, indeed," stammered the doctor.

Renée did not even take the trouble to reply to this remark except by a look of withering disdain, and seated herself by the fire without paying any further attention to her visitor.

This was generally the means she employed to terminate the interview; and Molinchart, not daring to persist in his efforts to keep up a conversation, generally beat a retreat after a minute or two.

This time, however, he took a chair and placed it at one corner of the hearth, where he could see the young girl's face.

"Mademoiselle," he began with rather more assurance, "I want to speak to you to-day, upon a very serious matter."

Renée shrugged her shoulders slightly, and without looking at him, replied:

"What is the use? Am I not mad?"

"I have never said so."

"Then why am I here?"

"Why, it seems to me that you came here of your own free will, and that it was at your own request that my friend took you from the cottage."

"Ah! this is really too much!" exclaimed Renée. "You can continue to talk in this strain, if you choose, but I shall not take the trouble to answer you."

The doctor, who had entered with eminently conciliatory intentions, secretly cursed his awkwardness and want of tact.

"You misunderstand my motives, mademoiselle," he said, timidly, "and if you will hear me to the end, you will be convinced that I have had nothing to do with the grief and annoyance you have experienced here. There is no longer any reason why I should conceal from you the fact that my friend, on bringing you here, declared that you were suffering from a malady that necessitated great care and strict seclusion."

"You could not tell me more politely that I had lost my reason," said the girl, ironically.

"I have studied your condition carefully," continued Molinhard, without paying any attention to this scornful interruption, and I tell you frankly that I have felt strong doubts of the truth of my friend's assertions from the very first of your sojourn here."

"Indeed! only doubts?"

"But now my doubts have become convictions, and I am very happy to admit that my friend was mistaken."

Renée turned suddenly and confronted the doctor.

"Ah! so you are kind enough to admit that I am not mad!" she exclaimed.

"I not only admit it, but am ready to testify to the fact, publicly."

"Then you will open the doors of this house for me instantly!" exclaimed Mlle. de Saint Senier, springing to her feet.

"Would that I could," sighed the doctor, with a contrite air. "I will certainly do so before very long, but first, I must beg you to listen to what I have to say to you."

"I am listening," said Renée, dryly.

"Several very sad and unfortunate events have occurred since your arrival here," began the doctor.

The girl made an impatient gesture.

"You must have felt surprised at the non-appearance of the friend to whom I am indebted for the pleasure—I should say the happiness—"

"Say rather the person who so basely deceived me. That would be the shortest and most correct way of putting it. But allow me to say that though he has not seen fit to intrude his unwelcome presence upon me, he has certainly secured a worthy substitute."

"You are cruel, mademoiselle; but I can understand and excuse your anger. My unfortunate friend has not returned simply because—he is dead."

"Indeed!" responded Renée, indifferently.

"Yes, it is supposed that he was murdered. His lifeless body was found in front of the cottage in which you formerly resided—"

"The keys of which he stole, in order that he might enter it by night like a common burglar. But what is all this to me?" she demanded, haughtily.

"Can you guess who is accused of the murder?" asked Molinchard.

"No, nor does it matter in the least to me."

"They accuse the persons who resided in the cottage," announced the doctor, with an important air, "and who disappeared the night the crime was committed."

"This is infamous!" exclaimed Renée, "and I trust that you will be the first to testify that there is no foundation for such a charge."

"I shall, of course, but I doubt very much if people will believe me. The case is so shrouded in mystery. They say, too, that a man was concealed in the cottage, and—"

"What has become of the man?" eagerly asked the girl, who had become very pale.

"The man has disappeared, but the authorities are searching for him, and for you, too, mademoiselle."

Renée seemed deeply agitated. At last, after quite a long silence, she said in calmer tones:

"I hardly know what to think of all you have just told me, but as you are kind enough to admit that I am in possession of my reason, I have a request to make of you."

"Speak, mademoiselle," said the doctor, promptly. "I implore you to take me to my aunt, Madame de Muire, who has been separated from me for reasons I am utterly unable to explain. These reasons, however, have probably ceased to exist, and I therefore beg you will restore to me the only relative whose advice and counsel I can ask. If you will do this, I shall be forever grateful to you."

Renée did not utter these last words without an effort; but she thought that her jailer might possibly be actuated by kindly motives, so she determined to make this final appeal to him.

Molinchard, instead of replying, assumed a grave, even melancholy air.

"Well, sir?" insisted the young girl.

"I have a great calamity to announce to you," murmured the doctor, sadly.

"A calamity! What do you mean?"

"Madame de Muire has just succumbed, after a long struggle, and—"

"Dead!" cried Renée, sinking back in her arm-chair—"dead! Oh, my God!"

And burying her face in her hands, she burst into an agony of weeping.

"It was only to be expected, mademoiselle," said Molinchard in that tone of commonplace consolation that is so exasperating to those who truly mourn. "Her malady was one of those against which human skill is powerless. I gave her every attention, and would have saved her, I assure you, had it been possible."

"Alone, alone! I am alone in the world!"

These words were distinctly audible between Renée's sobs, and the doctor, who was prepared for this outburst

of grief, thought that the moment had come to offer his victim hope and consolation.

"No; you are not alone in the world," he exclaimed, with a warmth that rendered him more ridiculous than ever, "for there is some one who will gladly watch over you, and protect you, and who—who loves you."

Renée looked up at him in tearful wonder.

"Yes; I love you, mademoiselle," continued Molinchard, trying to take her hand.

"Wretch!" cried Mlle. de Saint Senier, springing up, pale with anger.

The word had been uttered in such a tone of suppressed wrath that the doctor recoiled in positive terror.

"How dare you?" she continued, with a look of withering contempt.

Molinchard felt the more disconcerted from the fact that he was not accustomed to situations of this kind, and that this unfortunate declaration of love was, perhaps, the first he had ever made in his life.

"I certainly had no intention of offending you, mademoiselle," he faltered.

"Your presence here is in itself an outrage, and you will oblige me by leaving instantly."

These scornful words, while they cooled the ardor of the lover, exasperated the democrat to the highest pitch.

The envy and rancor that were a part of the man's nature regained their ascendancy in his heart, and he forgot his love for this young aristocrat, and only remembered that she was at his mercy.

"Leaving!" repeated Molinchard, with an evil smile. "I haven't the slightest desire to do anything of the kind. I am in my own house, recollect, and here I intend to remain."

"So this is the secret of your pretended interest!" exclaimed Mlle. de Saint Senier, thoroughly exasperated. "I might have known it, and I reproach myself bitterly for having consented to listen to you. You can kill me

THE RED BAND.

now, as you killed my aunt; but while I live you shall not touch me!"

And before the doctor had time to make a movement, she sprung to the glass door, opened it, and rushed out into the garden.

Molinchard had lost his wits completely, and he darted after her without recollecting that he would lose a part of his advantage in the open air.

"Help, help!" cried Renée, in a voice that rang out clear and piercing in her terror.

"It is useless, my beauty. No one listens to mad-women," said the wretch, grinding his teeth.

The young girl realized the truth of what he said, and felt that she was indeed lost. She had taken refuge in a corner of the garden, and to keep herself from falling, she was obliged to cling to the wall which separated her from the court-yard in which Podensac had lingered to smoke his pipe after the departure of his visitors.

Molinchard advanced toward his prisoner with the cat-like step of a tiger that is about to leap upon its prey. His eyes were haggard and his face flushed. His long, bony fingers trembled with rage, and oath after oath issued from his drawn lips.

"Will you come back into the house or not?" he hissed, with a sullen oath that sounded like the savage growl of a wild beast.

"Help! help! Murder, murder!" shrieked Mlle. de Saint Senier.

"If you don't hush, I'll find a way to silence you!" yelled Molinchard.

But as he was about to seize her, a clear and ringing voice resounded from the other side of the wall.

"Resist! We are coming to your aid!" it cried.

"Fool of a major!" hissed the wretch, thinking he recognized Podensac's voice. "I defy you to get in here, but you shall pay for this."

The doctor certainly had very little reason to dread any interference on the part of the commander of the *Enfants Perdus*.

He felt sure of Mother Ponisse's ability to stop him *en route*, but even supposing that Podensac succeeded in finding his way to this separate wing, the doctor counted upon the sturdy oaken door as a present protection, and upon his wonderful powers of prevarication to explain this scene of violence afterward.

Renée, however, had become a little more hopeful. Some one had heard and answered her appeal, and this encouraging fact gave her fresh courage; besides, the voice that had just responded aroused a blissful memory in her heart.

"Help! help! Save me! Save Renée de Saint Senior!" she cried at the top of her voice.

Two exclamations answered this frantic appeal, but the young girl did not hear them, for, with the iron hand of her odious persecutor holding her wrists, while he tried to close her mouth with the other, poor Renée had no other resource than to throw herself on the frozen ground and resist her enemy's efforts to drag her along with all the strength at her command.

The brutal doctor had become positively frantic with rage, and it is a wonder that he did not strangle his victim then and there. Perhaps he longed to, but dared not; perhaps, too, the bright sunlight frightened him, and he felt the need of first dragging his victim into his den, like some beast of prey.

He succeeded in doing this after ten minutes of violent effort. The door leading into the drawing-room was open, and Renée vainly tried to clutch it, to prevent herself from being dragged inside; but Molincharde's powerful hands tore her from it, and threw her panting and bruised upon the floor.

The monster uttered a yell of delight, and rushed forward to lock the only door through which the young girl's

cries could escape; and he was about returning to her when a dull sound attracted his attention and marred the joy of his triumph.

It was the sound of hurried footsteps, mingled with the confused murmur of angry voices.

Molinchard paused to listen.

His victim was lying at his feet, apparently unconscious.

The sound grew louder; it came from the interior of the building that adjoined Renée's prison.

Molinchard ran into the dining-room. There he could distinctly hear voices on the other side of the strong oaken door.

"This is the place," said a voice the doctor felt sure was that of Podensac.

"There's nobody here, I tell you," replied a husky voice, which was unquestionably that of Mother Ponisse.

Molinchard understood what was passing in the corridor perfectly now, and felt sure that his faithful subordinate would find some means of averting the danger.

Several heavy blows on the door interrupted these consoling reflections, however.

"Open the door! open the door! I know you are there, and I want to come in!" cried the deep bass voice of the leader of the Enfants Perdus.

"Oh, yes, try to open it," muttered Molinchard. "You won't succeed, though. The lock is strong."

"Will you open the door, or will you not?" repeated Podensac.

And, receiving no reply, he added, in the stern, curt tones of a commanding officer:

"Now, my brave man!"

"Ay, ay, sir," replied a coarse voice the doctor had never heard before, and in another moment there resounded a loud cracking noise that made him start with fear and surprise.

"Good God! they are trying to burst open the door!"

He stepped forward to see the result of the attempt, and felt considerably reassured on perceiving that the panels were intact and the lock unbroken.

"Now, my brave fellow, try her again!" cried the major.

Another violent push made the big door bend, and Molinchard sprung back as if afraid it was about to fall upon him.

"Oh, misery! they are tearing the whole house to pieces!"

"I am going for a commissioner of police!" cried Mother Ponisse.

"If you move, I'll wring your neck, old woman; do you hear me?" thundered Podensac.

Molinchard did not lose a word of this brief dialogue, which it is needless to say greatly increased the terror of Mlle. de Saint Senier's persecutor.

"Renée, here we are! We are coming to your rescue!" cried a voice that had not been heard before.

"They know her! I am lost!" muttered the doctor, turning as if to flee.

His victim was standing behind him. She was as pale as death, and her hair was disheveled, but she held herself proudly erect, and her eyes sparkled with joy.

Molinchard recoiled as if confronted by a specter, and his natural cowardice manifested itself in this abject appeal:

"Mademoiselle," he faltered, "I hardly know what has passed; but I am not to blame. It was only to save you from the consequences of the murder committed at the cottage, I—I—"

The wretch had lost his wits completely.

"You will forgive me, won't you?" he whined. "You will not denounce me. You will only say that—"

"I shall say that you tried to kill me as you killed my aunt," replied the girl, with unutterable scorn in her eyes and in her voice.

Molinchard uttered a hoarse exclamation.

The screws that held the lock had just started a little under a still more violent shock. One more effort, and it would yield.

"You sha'n't have a chance to tell such a falsehood. I'll kill you first," shouted the fiend, springing at Renée's throat with the evident intention of strangling her.

"Attention, my man!" cried the powerful voice of the leader of the besieging party. "Once more, and for the last time. Now for it!"

A loud crash followed this exclamation of triumph.

The ponderous staple in which the bolt rested had been torn from the wall, and almost simultaneously the door itself flew open, giving free passage to the young girl's rescuers.

Their abrupt entrance would have seemed really ludicrous, had not the danger been so great.

The stalwart personage whose last vigorous push had accomplished such wonders suddenly finding himself deprived of the support afforded by the door, pitched headlong into the room and against the doctor, felling him to the ground. At the same time, Mlle. de Saint Senior sprang into the arms that had opened to receive her, murmuring Roger's name in a transport of delight.

"Renée!" he cried, "Renée! You are not hurt? Say you are not hurt!"

But his betrothed had not strength to reply.

"Carry her into the next room," said Podensac, who had constituted himself commander-in-chief of the army that was besieging the Molinchart Bastille. •

While Roger and his friend lifted the young girl, and carried her to the very arm-chair in which she had just listened to that insulting declaration of love, the doctor was struggling to release himself from the grasp of the ponderous assailant that had fallen with and upon him, but all his efforts proved unavailing, and a harsh voice vociferated in his ear:

"Ah, scoundrel! I've got you now, and you'll never have a chance to eat another meal."

"Don't kill him! don't kill him!" cried Podensac. "We shall need him by and by."

"Release the man, Antoine," cried Roger.

Pilevert, for it was he, reluctantly obeyed, though he could not resist the temptation to give the doctor a kick as he rose to his feet, saying, in the same tone he would have used in speaking to a dog:

"Get up! get up, I say!"

The doctor did not move, however.

"Where is the old woman?" asked Podensac.

"She has run away, I do believe!" exclaimed Antoine. "I'll bet she has gone in search of a commissioner of police. I'll see that this scoundrel has no chance to get away, though," he added, stationing himself in the door-way.

Renée had not lost consciousness entirely, but her nerves had undergone such a shock that she had fallen into a sort of stupor. Her eyes were full of tears, but they were utterly devoid of expression.

"If you will take my advice," said Podensac, "you will get your cousin away from here as soon as possible. I don't believe this is a very safe place for her or for you."

"But how can that be managed?" inquired Roger. "She is not able to walk, as you see."

"You must take her away in a carriage, of course, but, first, let us get rid of this precious doctor. It isn't necessary for him to hear our conversation. I'll settle my own little account with him by and by. Pick him up and carry him out into the garden, Pilevert."

Before the doctor could get upon his feet, the acrobat seized him around the middle of the body, and, lifting him like a sack of flour, walked into the drawing-room with his burden.

"I protest against this violence," cried Molinchard. "It is a foul conspiracy!"

"Yell all you like, old fellow," sneered Pilevert. "Where shall I put him?" he added, turning to Podensac.

"In here," the major replied, opening the door of the room in which Mme. de Muire spent the first night of her captivity. "In the garden he might create a disturbance among his patients, but in this room he can trouble no one."

"That's so!" cried the acrobat, throwing the doctor on the bed with as little ceremony as if he had been a bundle, and before Molinchart had time to offer any resistance the door was closed and securely locked.

"That's what I call quick work," said the commander of the Enfants Perdus, "and now, my brave fellow, do me the favor to guard the passage while we arrange for our departure."

"I think you had better lose no time," continued Podensac, turning to the lieutenant. "It was certainly your lucky star that brought you here to see a wounded comrade just when you did. Had you come half an hour sooner you would have met Valnoir and his lady-love, to say nothing of Taupier; and I have an idea that it was a desire to find out something about this very lady that brought them here. I don't think they're very kindly disposed toward you, or toward her for that matter; and as journalists are rather dangerous persons in these days we had better not wait for their return. Now, my brave fellow," he continued, addressing the acrobat, "do us the favor to run down to the park and bring us a carriage as soon as possible."

"I'm off," cried Antoine.

But he had taken only a step or two when he suddenly paused and exclaimed:

"I think I shall be spared the trouble of going for a carriage. There is one coming now."

Pilevert was not mistaken. It was certainly the roll of carriage wheels that he heard.

"How fortunate!" exclaimed Roger.

"I don't agree with you," said the major, shaking his head. "It is a very unusual thing to see a carriage up here on the heights; and I shouldn't be surprised if this was bringing the officer that old hag went in search of."

"But I am not afraid of the police," replied Roger.

"You have reason to be so long as there is a Taupier in the case. We shall soon know what to think, however, for the carriage has stopped."

There was a moment of silent suspense, then the sound of hurried footsteps was heard in the corridor. Had the police really come to the aid of the proprietor of the Villa on the Heights?

This seemed more than probable, and it was now too late to prevent their interference, however disagreeable it might be: so Roger and Podensac prepared to make the best of it, and with eyes fixed on the door quietly awaited the entrance of the officers.

But just as they expected to see the commissioner appear before them the steps paused. The person did not seem to know his way very well, for they heard him turn back and then again retrace his steps.

"That is strange," muttered the major. "He doesn't seem to know which way to go. He must have lost Mother Ponisse on the way."

"It would be better for us to go boldly out and ask him what he wants than to act as if we were hiding," said Saint Senier, stepping to the door.

Just as he reached it some one rapped and a voice asked:

"May I come in?"

"Certainly," replied the officer.

The door being no longer held in place by the lock yielded readily to the slight push that made it turn upon its hinges. A man appeared upon the threshold, and two exclamations resounded simultaneously:

"My lieutenant!"

"Landreau!"

It was indeed the old gamekeeper that stood before them in the same quaint costume he had worn for some time, but he had aged considerably. His hair and beard were snow white, and his emaciated face testified to the anxiety and privations he had undergone.

But though he had changed in appearance he had the same warm heart as in days gone by, for on recognizing his master he became nearly frantic with joy.

It is needless to say that the lieutenant received him with open arms.

"What, is it really you? Do I really see you again, Monsieur Roger, and looking so strong and well!" exclaimed the old gamekeeper shedding tears of joy. "Ah! the little deaf and dumb girl told me the truth when she said that you had entirely recovered from your wound."

After an interchange of friendly greetings Roger went back to the drawing-room accompanied by Landreau, who had no sooner entered it than his eyes fell upon Renée.

"Mademoiselle!" he exclaimed, throwing himself on his knees beside his young mistress. "Ah! how merciful God is to restore you both to me at the same time!"

He took her hand with even more tenderness than reverence; but the young girl continued cold and motionless. She looked at him but did not seem to recognize him.

"Mademoiselle, it is I, your old Landreau! Oh, how rejoiced I am to see you again! Madame de Muire is the only one missing now."

Receiving no response, he rose in alarm and dropped the cold hand he had been holding.

"What is it? What has happened?" he asked, anxiously, turning to the lieutenant.

"I do not know yet; but I fear she is going to be very ill, and I want to get her away from here," replied Roger.

"And the sooner you do it the better," exclaimed the lieutenant.

"It will be an easy matter, for I have a carriage at the door," remarked Landreau.

"Then help me to carry her to it, for we have no time to lose."

"I think I had better go out and reconnoiter a little first," said Podensac. "The old woman may return at any moment, and Heaven only knows who she'll bring with her. If I see no signs of her I'll return and tell you, and we can then carry the young lady to the carriage. After you are once out of the house Mother Ponisse will have a hard time to find out what has become of you; but I shall have a talk with Citizen Molinhard, and if he evinces any intention of giving us any further trouble I'll thrash him soundly, I promise you."

And without waiting for any reply Podensac rushed out into the passage.

"How strangely she acts," said Roger. "I don't know what to think of this excessive pallor and this strange silence. Who knows but that wretch's violence may have impaired her reason?"

Such a fear was indeed justified by the condition of prostration and torpor in which the girl remained.

"And to think that we have nothing here to restore her! not even a drop of brandy!" muttered Pilevert.

"Don't be frightened, lieutenant," said Landreau. "I've known mademoiselle ever since she was a child. She is very nervous, you see; and any violent shock brings on a nervous spasm. It is a peculiarity of the family, and this is not the first time I've seen her in such a condition. The day you brought her brother home after the duel it was just the same, you recollect."

"That is true," said the lieutenant, thoughtfully.

"We shall reach home in an hour, too; and then you'll see how faithfully Mademoiselle Regina will nurse her."

"You have seen her then? But tell me, my friend, how do you happen to be here?"

"She sent me. I have a long story to tell you, lieutenant."

"I believed you dead."

"I was very near to it at one time, I assure you. I have been kept in prison two months on the charge of being a deserter."

"A deserter?"

"Yes. It would take me too long to explain now, so I will only say that I was not released until to-day. I didn't like to go straight to the cottage for fear something had happened there during my stay in prison, so I went first to your house to ask if your old *concierge* who, by the way, has remained with the new owners, could give me any news of you. It was a good thing that I did, for I learned that you had succeeded in making your escape from Saint Germain in company with Mademoiselle Regina, that the owners of the house had fled before the siege, and that you had all come to take up your abode there. And while the *concierge* was talking with me who should come down the stairs but little Regina. She threw her arms around my neck and then began to scribble away on her slate, and when I heard that you had come here to see a comrade, I could stand it no longer, but ran out in search of a carriage without even waiting to go upstairs and see your—"

"You have saved us! and it was Providence that must have inspired you with the idea of coming here," interrupted Roger.

"And to think that you should have come here merely to visit a wounded comrade and found Mademoiselle Renée!" exclaimed Landreau. "How did she happen to be in this big barrack of a place that looks to me very much like a prison?"

"I do not know; but I do know that but for me and this brave man," said the lieutenant, pointing to Filevert, "Renée would have become the victim of an infamous scoundrel."

"Where is the wretch?"

"I shall see to it that he gets his deserts by and by. You need have no fears that he will escape the punishment he so richly deserves."

"But where is Madame la Comtesse? Did they shut her up here, too?"

"I do not know what has become of my poor aunt; but I shall soon find out, and when I do I shall avenge the injury that has been done our family, I assure you."

Renée remained silent. Though she knew her aunt's fate she could not utter a word.

"The road is clear! There isn't a soul in sight!" cried Podensac, rushing into the room. "You had better leave immediately. Help us to carry mademoiselle out in the arm-chair," he added, turning to Pilevert.

In the twinkling of an eye the chair was lifted and carried down the passage to the door.

"By the way, have you heard the news?" asked the old gamekeeper as they walked along.

Roger shook his head.

"There is an armistice. The siege is ended, for we have surrendered."

"Impossible!" cried Podensac.

"The news is on all the bulletin boards, and one can leave the city by procuring a pass. I shouldn't be sorry to see the forest of Saint Germain again, upon my word!"

Roger made no reply.

"They had reached the outside door and in another minute Renée was safe in the carriage. Pilevert climbed upon the box beside the coachman, and Landreau and his master took seats inside.

"Good-bye, lieutenant," said Podensac, as he closed the carriage door. "If an armistice has really been signed, I'd advise you to leave Paris no later than to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXV.

NEARLY two months have elapsed since Roger de Saint Senier rescued Renée from the clutches of Dr. Molin-chard.

It is the middle of March, and the mild and balmy air indicates the near approach of spring. The trees in the Park Monceau are covered with buds, and the birds salute the sun with their joyful songs. In short, reviving nature seems anxious to make Parisians forget the horrors of the siege.

On a bench near the park gate leading to the outer boulevard two men are sitting side by side; but the numerous signs of the return of the season of flowers seem to exert no influence over them, for they are talking seriously, even gloomily, and without paying any heed to what is going on around them.

"So you insist upon beginning the campaign this very day?" remarked the elder of the two men.

"I must, my dear major, for I have only three or four days at my disposal, as I must return to Burgundy as soon as possible."

"Oh, yes, I can well understand your anxiety to rejoin the charming cousin who is soon to become your wife," remarked Podensac.

Roger shook his head sadly.

"My marriage is decided, but Heaven only knows when it will take place," he said gloomily.

It was not mere chance that had brought the two friends together after a six weeks' separation.

Saint Senier, who had arrived in Paris the evening before, had only taken time to secure rooms at a hotel before writing to Podensac to request him to spend the next morning

with him, and the major had promptly obeyed the summons for several reasons.

In the first place he had had nothing to do since the armistice. The *Enfants Perdus* of the Rue Maubuce had disbanded, and their leader found himself out of business, to his very great chagrin, for his financial condition was not brilliant. In the second place, he had been in close correspondence with Roger ever since the latter's departure from the city, and he was anxious to keep up an acquaintance that might be of great service to him in days to come.

The ex-lieutenant—for Saint Senier too had returned to private life—had received him very cordially, and had asked his immediate assistance in an important matter.

"I will explain as we go along," Roger had remarked, and Podensac followed him without asking any questions.

They had walked in the direction of the Park Monceau, and the conversation had begun upon the bench on which they were still seated.

"Let us come to a full understanding before we engage in this affair," remarked Podensac. "It isn't a duel with that brute of a Molincharde you want, I suppose?"

"No—he is beneath my notice—but a duel with some one else, perhaps, though I wish first to clear up a mystery that troubles me more than anything else."

"Yes, Madame de Muire's mysterious disappearance; but I hardly think you will get at the facts of that without the assistance of the police, and it is doubtful if they would take the matter up at this late day. I am sorry that you have waited so long."

"It was only three days ago that I learned anything definite, so you see I have lost no time."

"What! couldn't Mademoiselle de Saint Senier tell you—"

"You saw her condition when we took her from the den in which that wretch had incarcerated her. I succeeded, as you know, in getting out of the city two days afterward

with her, but when she reached the chateau I had very little hope of her life, and fifty terrible days passed before she could be considered out of danger."

"And of course it was not until convalescence was established that she could tell you—"

"The history of her unfortunate aunt who was entrapped like herself, and who perhaps became a victim to this man's villainy."

"I am of the opinion that Madame de Muire is still alive. Molinchart is a scoundrel, but he is a coward as well, and I really do not believe that he would dare to commit a murder."

"Heaven grant that you are right, but if he deceived Renée when he told her that her aunt was dead, he must tell us what he has done with her."

"Oh! we'll find a way to make him do that, never fear. But I have never told you what occurred after your departure. Scarcely twenty minutes had elapsed before the Ponisse returned in a furious passion, for nobody at the station-house would pay the slightest attention to her. When she found that you had all gone she was ready to tear my eyes out, but I gave her to understand she had better not tamper with me."

"How about Molinchart?"

"I expected he would make a scene when I opened the door of his cell, but he had become as meek as a lamb, and didn't ask me for a word of explanation."

"Nor gave you any, I presume?"

"While I was taking him to task for his conduct Valnoir's sweetheart returned, in company with Taupier—the hunchback you met at Saint Germain."

"Or, in other words, the assassin," muttered Roger.

"Possibly; he is certainly capable of it," said Podensac, though he knew nothing about the discarded bullet. "This much is certain: the two took Molinchart into his office, where a stormy scene ensued. I don't know what

they said to him, but I am satisfied that the entire editorial staff of the 'Serpenteau' were implicated in the abduction of those poor ladies."

"And so am I," said the lieutenant, "and I fully intend to have a settlement with them by and by."

"I'll assist you, if you wish, with the greatest pleasure. But to make a long story short, when I saw how things were going I took my trunk and left without so much as saying good-day to that cur of a Molinchard."

"And since?"

"Since then I've been spending my time in getting well in a more respectable establishment at Passy, where I regained the use of both my arms, which are now very much at your service."

"Thanks, major," said Roger; "I accept your offer, and you can count upon my eternal gratitude and friendship."

"What you say rejoices my heart," exclaimed Podensac, "for I am tired of associating with a set of scoundrels that are not fit for even a decent Prussian to wipe his feet on, and even if I haven't always acted exactly as I ought, it is not too late for me to reform."

"I don't know what cause you have to reproach yourself in the past, major, and I don't care to know, but I shall never forget what you did for me at Bezons."

"Oh! that was a mere trifle—a debt I owed to the pretty little deaf and dumb girl who told my fortune at Rueil some time before. By the way, what has become of her. You wrote me that you had taken her away with you, in company with the brave fellow who helped us burst open Molinchard's door. I am sure she must have nursed Made-moiselle de Saint Senier splendidly. A nice girl she is, unquestionably. And only to think that I was fool enough to think her in love with that odious Taupier."

"She did, indeed, nurse my cousin with unwearying devotion," said Roger, sadly, "but she has just left us again."

“Impossible!”

“Yes, on the very day that there was a decided change for the better in Renée’s condition, Regina mysteriously disappeared.”

“And how about the acrobat?”

“Oh, he asked permission to leave at the end of the first week. I think he was pining to return to his old business.”

“And the girl has probably rejoined him,” said Podensac, philosophically. “But Mademoiselle de Saint Senior is not alone, I suppose?”

“No, certainly not, for in addition to our old servants and our worthy Landreau she has her—one of our relatives to watch over her. But it seems to me that we had better be starting for Montmartre.”

“It is quarter of nine,” said the major, glancing at his watch. “By half past nine we shall be at the heights, and catch Molincharde just as he is getting out of bed.”

The two friends started up the outer boulevard, which, strange to say, they found well-nigh deserted. At that hour of the day this thoroughfare is usually crowded with laborers and artisans, but our friends saw only a few members of the National Guard hastening in the direction of Montmartre.

On reaching the Place Clichy they found a detachment of regulars drawn up around the base of Marshal Moncey’s statue, but did not feel sufficient curiosity to inquire the cause of this.

They had reached the head-quarters of the political club of which Taupier was president, when they perceived a large crowd in and about the Place Pigalle, and saw bayonets glittering in the sunlight, and heard the confused murmur of an excited throng.

“What the devil is going on down there?” muttered Podensac. “Are the Prussians coming back, or—?”

He had not completed the sentence when a quick discharge of musketry interrupted him.

It was not the simultaneous fire of a squad, but rather resembled the desultory firing of sharpshooters. In any case it was not intended as a mere salute, for two or three bullets whistled through the air above the heads of the two friends. Roger paid very little attention to it, but Podensac was greatly astonished.

"They must all have gone mad in this satanic neighborhood," he muttered. "They seem to be planning another revolution."

"Let us go on," remarked Saint Senier. "We shall soon find out what the matter is."

But the two friends had not gone twenty yards when they encountered a hurrying throng made up principally of women and children. They were fleeing in such hot haste that they nearly knocked Podensac down. He tried to stop one respectable-looking *bourgeois* who was rushing along with all his might, and ask an explanation, but the old gentleman slipped from his grasp, and hastened on, uttering only a few incoherent words.

"There's no such thing as getting any satisfaction out of them," muttered the major, trying to stem the impetuous tide, but though Roger assisted him to the best of his ability, their progress was very slow.

As they neared the square the tumult seemed to increase, but the firing had stopped, and they heard exclamations whose significance they did not clearly understand.

"They are crying *Vive* something," said the lieutenant, "but what I do not understand."

They had just passed the Rue Lepic when they met a party of ragamuffins howling:

"We are betrayed! To arms! They are slaughtering our brothers."

"Oh, ho! I begin to understand," said Podensac, who had witnessed the revolution of February, 1848.

"Look," said Roger, pressing his friend's arm.

A squad of gendarmes was coming up the street on the

double-quick, and though the crowd opened to let them pass, it saluted them with hostile cries.

Saint Senier approached their leader to ask him the meaning of all this, but after he glanced at his face he dared not question him. He was an old gray-haired lieutenant, but Roger saw a big tear roll down his wrinkled cheek.

"There's going to be trouble, I'm afraid," said the former leader of the Enfants Perdus, "and I bet that those scamps that edit the 'Serpenteau' are at the bottom of it."

"Let us go on," replied Saint Senier, whose thoughts were much more engrossed with Molinhard than with any possible revolution.

By pushing and being pushed, the two friends finally reached the square, and just as they reached it the few remaining soldiers retreated into the adjoining streets, leaving the victorious populace in full possession.

The wildest disorder prevailed. Fierce yells and shouts resounded on every side. Some were singing the Marseillaise, others were dancing, some were running aimlessly to and fro.

"This begins to look serious," said Podensac, pointing to a pool of blood on the pavement. A little further on, a crowd had collected around the door of a shop into which the wounded man had been carried.

The major joined the group, and was obliged to ask only a few questions to learn the cause of the disturbance.

The conspirators who had not hesitated to plan an insurrection while the enemy was still at the gates of Paris—the conspirators who had been speculating upon the misfortunes of their country for six months, had at last accomplished their object.

The first day of the Commune had dawned.

"I suspected as much," said Podensac, when he had learned the facts of the case; "and I think the wisest course for us to pursue is to retreat in good order to Paris,

and postpone our visit until to-morrow. A trip to the heights seems to be rather dangerous to all but those who wear blouses just at the present time."

"I will go alone then," said Saint Senier, dryly.

The major colored slightly, then hastened to say:

"I thought you knew me better, my dear comrade. If you really wish to go to-day I will accompany you, of course. What I said was rather on your account than my own, for I've an idea that I sha'n't run much risk."

Roger pressed his hand in silent gratitude.

"Let me go ahead," continued Podensac. "I know the shortest way, and I hope we shall get along without any serious trouble."

Their progress was arrested at almost every step, but they finally succeeded in getting out of the square and into a street leading directly to Montmartre. Here the crowd was much less dense, but it was necessary to make way for an armed band that swept down the street like an avalanche.

It was a band of the so-called "Reds," who were dragging along in triumph a dozen or more disreputable-looking deserters from the regular army.

"A fine conquest they have made!" growled Podensac, scanning the frightened and bewildered countenances of the poor soldiers, who looked much more like prisoners than valiant patriots.

The living wave passed by, and the two friends continued their climb, and finally succeeded in reaching without much difficulty a broad street, at the further end of which they could dimly discern the mayor's office of Montmartre. But they had scarcely set foot in this street before they found themselves swept along by another resistless torrent of human beings; but the crowd that filled the square through which they had just passed was peaceable in comparison with this hooting and yelling rabble that had appropriated several pieces of artillery.

The major began to regret that he had chosen this route, and attempted to beat a retreat, but once in the rushing tide, there was no way of escaping from it, and the two friends were obliged to allow themselves to be swept swiftly on, and it was not until they reached the foot of the hill that they even had a chance to breathe.

The steep ascent checked the progress of the guns, and the crowd paused as if awaiting reinforcements.

Podensac succeeded in forcing his way to the edge of the crowd.

"I think we shall succeed in getting out of this scrape," he remarked to Roger, who had followed him closely, "for I know a path that passes the mill and that will take us to Molincharde's house by making a slight *dé-tour*." In fact, he maneuvered so cleverly that in less than ten minutes he and Saint Senier succeeded in reaching a vacant lot that overlooked the esplanade of a battery constructed during the siege.

This esplanade seemed to be deserted, and they crossed it without meeting any one, but on reaching the road that skirted the embankment, they found themselves in the midst of a group composed of armed National Guards.

These men, who were all hard-looking customers, seemed to have been stationed there to arrest any passer-by, for they instantly proceeded to collar the new-comers.

"Where are you going, citizens?" they asked, in chorus.

"To Dr. Molincharde's hospital," replied Podensac, promptly.

"Molincharde? We know nothing about any such person," replied the band in unison.

And the man who appeared to be the leader, added in anything but reassuring tones:

"Follow us into the presence of the committee."

"We know nothing about any committee," retorted the major.

"So you want to be insolent, 'do' you!" cried the leader.
"Here, you fellows, seize these men."

"You must be mad!" exclaimed Podensac, in a towering rage.

"By what authority do you arrest me?" asked Roger, disdainfully.

"You will find out when you're brought before the committee," replied the leader of the band.

During this brief but stormy conversation, his followers surrounded the two friends, who found themselves also flanked by six National Guards, before they could make the slightest movement.

"I told you so," whispered the major.

Roger, whose anger was now thoroughly aroused, involuntarily felt for the saber he had been wearing for the past six months, but suddenly recollected that he was unarmed. At the same instant, Podensac gave him a warning nudge with his elbow, and he restrained himself, less from a fear of the hostile bayonets around him, than a well-bred man's natural aversion to a pugilistic encounter.

"Forward!" cried the grotesque personage in command.

He looked utterly unlike his soldiers, for while they all appeared exactly what they were—roughs of the very lowest type, he affected the costume and manners of the famous Fra Diavolo.

He was a tall young man, absurdly thin, and the possessor of an immensely long mustache, and a goatee as pointed as a needle. He wore a short red mantle, and a broad-brimmed felt hat, adorned with a long ostrich plume.

As Roger and Podensac, pale but defiant, were hurried on by their disreputable-looking escort, a yelling, whooping crowd gathered around them, lavishing such choice epithets as spies and murderers upon them, and clamoring for their blood.

This crowd, of course, greatly retarded their progress,

and it took them at least twenty minutes to reach the square in front of the church.

Here, Fra Diavolo, who was still in command, ordered his men to turn to the left, and subsequently to the right.

Saint Senier had never been in Montmartre, except on the day of his visit to Molinichard's establishment, so he had no idea where they were taking him, and gazed around him with astonishment when he found himself in a narrow street, inclosed on either side by high walls, and paved with irregular, pointed stones. Had it not been for the crowd and the confusion that pervaded the spot, one would have supposed one's self in a country town, a hundred leagues from Paris.

At the first corner they came to, they encountered a ragged sentinel who demanded the password, which was promptly given.

Podensac had not expected to find any well-organized system of surveillance on the heights, and he began to think that matters were looking pretty serious; while Saint Senier, who was much less conversant with the spirit of the populace than his friend, still regarded his arrest merely as an unfortunate *contretemps*.

The prisoners were promptly ushered into a narrow court-yard, and thence into a garden, where a singular sight presented itself. The place was filled with communists, arrayed in uniforms of every sort and kind. They were pacing to and fro, or standing in groups, but their muskets were stacked along the wall.

They greeted the new-comers with shouts of derisive laughter, but without any signs of astonishment, so it was only reasonable to suppose that other prisoners had been brought in to what seemed to be the head-quarters of this dangerous revolt.

Overlooking this neglected garden, was a two-story house from which issued a confused murmur of excited voices.

"Well," said Podensac, trying to appear much more in-

different than he really was, "are we going to see this famous committee, at last?"

"In a moment, citizen," replied the wearer of the red mantle, gravely. "The committee is in session now, and as soon as the trial on hand is concluded you will be admitted."

"Ah! so they are trying some one now!" exclaimed Podensac. "Whom, may I ask?"

"The enemies of the people," replied the man, who spoke with a strong southern accent.

"The deuce! I didn't know that the people had so many enemies, nor had I any idea that we were in a court-house. The place looks more to me like a military encampment," he added, pointing to the soldiers and their guns.

"That is the execution squad," answered the man, looking Podensac full in the face.

"Oh! everything is perfectly organized, I see," remarked the major, whose courage always rose in the presence of immediate and visible danger.

His coolness seemed to make some impression upon the communist.

"The people are just, citizen," he remarked, in milder tones; "and if you are not an enemy you have nothing to fear."

"I hope not, indeed," muttered Podensac.

"You can step inside now, citizens," cried the man in the plumed hat, pointing to the door of the house which had just been opened.

Two communists, muskets in hand, had appeared in the open door-way.

"Whose turn is it?" cried one of them, a big ragged fellow who seemed to be considerably under the influence of liquor.

"Ours," responded Podensac, promptly.

"Then make haste. The committee don't like to be kept waiting."

"Nor do I," responded the major.

And, turning to his companion in misfortune, he added in subdued tones:

"Let me do the talking when they question us. I have an idea that I can get out of the scrape, and get you out too."

Roger nodded an assent, and the two friends crossed the threshold arm in arm, followed by the wearer of the plumed hat.

"Where are we to go?" asked Podensac, seeing two or three closed doors before him.

The answer was prompt, though it did not come from his guards. One of the doors opened, and a man stepped out and cried in a solemn tone that would have done honor to the bailiff of a court of assizes:

"Bring in the accused."

"We are the accused, I suppose," said Podensac. "Let us take a look at this famous tribunal."

And he stepped inside, closely followed by Roger, who seemed to be but little impressed by this show of authority.

The apartment in which they found themselves was long and narrow, and but dimly lighted by a single window that overlooked the garden through which they had just passed.

Several armed men were leaning against the walls, but the council charged with announcing the decrees of the people consisted of five or six persons who were seated behind a table, in front of the window.

As they sat with their backs to the light, it was impossible to distinguish their faces or their costume very distinctly, but Roger perceived that all, or nearly all of them, wore the *kepi* of the National Guard.

A vacant space had been reserved between the tribunal and the motley crowd that filled the other end of the room.

The man with the plumed hat, who seemed to be per-

fectly at home, pushed the two friends into this vacant space, and stepping forward, saluted the council respectfully.

"Let us hear your report, citizen," said the presiding officer, whose voice instantly attracted Podensac's attention.

"Citizens," replied this modern Fra Diavolo, "I, with my men, was guarding the road below the battery on Windmill Hill, when we saw these two men crossing the esplanade with the apparent intention of examining the ground."

"That is false!" interrupted Podensac.

"Silence, prisoners!" cried the same shrill voice that had struck the major before.

"I had received orders to arrest all suspicious persons, so I seized these men without paying any attention to their protests and excuses, and had them brought here."

"You did exactly right, citizen, and you can now return to your post of duty."

This summary way of hearing and dismissing witnesses augured ill for the impartiality with which the proceedings of this tribunal were conducted, and Podensac began to prepare himself for the examination that would undoubtedly follow, though Saint Senier was still inclined to regard the whole thing as a farce.

"Approach, you fellows!" cried the presiding officer, coarsely.

For several minutes this singular magistrate had been moving uneasily about in his chair, unmindful of his dignity as a presiding officer, and he now leaned eagerly forward, placing his hand over his eyes to serve as a sort of screen.

He was evidently trying to get a good look at the features of the prisoners who had just been brought before him.

Podensac, whose curiosity had also been aroused, obeyed the order very willingly, for he too was anxious to get a

good look at the person who addressed him in this peremptory fashion, but in this mutual scrutiny the major had the worst of it, for the light was shining full in his eyes, while his adversary was sitting with his back to the window.

"What is your name?" brusquely inquired the presiding officer, who did not seem to have recognized the prisoner, in spite of his efforts.

"Podensac. Is there no resident of the Rue Maubuée present?"

● On hearing this name, and this question, the official gave a violent start.

It was the only manifestation of surprise that he gave, however.

"And what is your name?" he asked, turning to Roger.

"I do not recognize your right to question me," replied the lieutenant; "but I have no objection to telling you that my name is Saint Senier, and that I was formerly an officer in the Guard Mobile."

On receiving this response, the presiding officer moved about more uneasily than over.

Podensac nudged his friend to prevent him from making this imprudent admission, but he was too late, so he hastily interposed to prevent any further imprudence on his companion's part, for it was certainly very imprudent to declare one's self a member of the Guard Mobile before the communists of Montmartre.

But before he gave a free rein to his eloquence, he was anxious to get a good look at his judges, so stepping close enough to the table to touch it, he exclaimed:

"Now, I think this joke has been carried far enough. I am just as good a citizen as you are, and I hope—"

Here, to the intense astonishment of Saint Senier, he paused, and bursting into a hearty fit of laughter, exclaimed:

"Well, well! this is rich! How are you, Taupier?"

And he held out his hand to the presiding officer with the evident expectation of seeing it cordially accepted. But the incorruptible magistrate drew back with a dignified movement, and accompanied his refusal to fraternize with this severe remark:

"I have no personal friends when I am presiding over the meetings of the committee.

"This is a little too much!" exclaimed Podensac, really amazed by this display of impudence.

Had he had a little more time for reflection, however, he would have been less surprised, for the hunchback—it was really he whom the revolt had lifted to this pinnacle of human greatness—had long entertained feelings of a decidedly unfriendly nature toward the major. Their last meeting had occurred on the day when Renée de Saint Senier was so miraculously rescued from Molinchard's clutches, and ever since that time Taupier had disliked and distrusted Podensac.

His hatred was not sufficiently intense, perhaps, to induce him to make any attempt to suppress the major according to his favorite method, but as chance had delivered him into his hands, he was not uninclined to take advantage of this opportunity to close his lips forever.

Moreover, the name and the presence of Saint Senier had a powerful effect upon the vindictive hunchback, who flattered himself that the hour of his vengeance had come at last.

"Citizens," he said, raising his voice, so as to be distinctly heard by the entire audience, "here are two men who were discovered prowling around the guns that the aristocrats have tried to take from you."

"That is false!" interrupted the incorrigible major.

"I will proceed to examine them," continued the hunchback, without appearing to notice the interruption, "and the committee can then render its verdict."

"Yes, yes!" cried the spectators.

- Just as the excitement created by the agreeable announcement was at its height, the door opened softly and a man stole into the room.

The new-comer seemed anxious to conceal himself in the crowd, but his lofty stature made this attempt an impossibility, for he was at least a head taller than any of the National Guards and Zouaves of whom the audience was mainly composed.

He wore the *kepi* with which the insurgents never willingly dispensed, and this war-like head-gear, poised awkwardly upon his long, thin hair, gave him a very odd appearance.

His costume, too, was startling in the extreme, being a compound of the civil and the military: a sky-blue cravat with floating ends, a maroon jacket faced with red, and blue trousers with yellow side-stripes made up his attire.

No parrot was ever arrayed in brighter plumage.

In any other place the entrance of such a singular-looking person would have created a sensation, but the most eccentric costumes prevailed in this assembly, and no one turned to look at the new-comer.

Podensac, whose faculties were on the alert, in spite of the danger of his situation, was the only person that noticed his entrance, and it soon seemed to him that the peculiar face was not unfamiliar to him, and he tried to think when and where he had seen it before.

"Prisoner, what was your business on the heights?" cried Taupier, addressing Saint Senier this time.

Roger hesitated an instant before he replied.

He scorned to vindicate himself to such creatures, but he reflected that it was probably the only way by which he could regain his liberty, and that he had a sacred duty to perform that day.

"I was going to call on some one who resides in this neighborhood," he replied, curtly.

"Indeed!" responded the hunchback, ironically. "You choose a strange time to do your visiting."

This joke pleased the audience, and approving laughter was heard on every side.

"And what is the name of the person you proposed to visit?" he continued, in the same arrogant tone.

Podensac was about to give the name of one of the Enfants Perdus who resided at Montmartre, for he perceived the danger; but Saint Senier, who was beginning to lose his temper, prevented him by saying:

"The person's name is Molinchard, and he has a hospital near here. You must be aware of the fact, for he is a friend of yours, I believe," added the imprudent young man, dryly.

This confession decided his fate. The hunchback could no longer doubt the object of the lieutenant's intended visit to the doctor's house, and the opportunity to get rid of such a dangerous enemy was too tempting.

"Doctor Molinchard is a patriotic citizen," he said, with perfidious sweetness; "and if he would vouch for a man, the committee would not hesitate to release him, no matter how strongly he might be suspected. We will send for him, and see if—"

"It would be useless," interrupted Saint Senier. "He has never even seen me."

Podensac was in despair.

"You hear what he says, citizens!" cried the hunchback, with a tragical air. "It is evident that he is trying to deceive the people."

"Yes, yes! he is an aristocrat. There is no doubt of it," cried one.

"And a spy in disguise!" added another.

"Shoot him!"

Exclamations like these resounded from every part of the hall, and the major concluded that it was quite time for him to interfere.

"Look here, my friends," he cried, "just do me the favor to listen to me a moment. I'm no aristocrat, as everybody knows, and I certainly didn't command the Enfants Perdus of the Rue Mauboué during the entire siege to play the part of a spy afterward, and a spy upon Frenchmen, at that!"

This little speech, delivered in firm, resolute tones, seemed to make a favorable impression on the crowd; but the hunchback had too much at stake not to make a strenuous effort to check this growing friendliness on the part of the audience.

"Ask even friend Taupier, who pretends not to know me—ask him if I am a spy?" continued Podensac.

"I don't say that *you* are, citizen," replied that official, rather taken aback by this straightforward appeal; "but you have some very undesirable acquaintances—"

"I will vouch for the innocence of this acquaintance, at least," replied Podensac, promptly; "and if you will only allow two or three men and a corporal to accompany me to Molinhard's house, I will guarantee that he, too, will vouch for my friend, though he has never seen him."

Podensac felt that he was perfectly safe in promising this, for he had at his disposal certain arguments that could not fail to make an impression on Molinhard's troubled conscience.

But Taupier mistrusted his intentions, and hastily replied:

"The people have not time to wait. How do we know but the upholders of despotism are already returning in force to take from us the guns they tried so hard to turn over to the Prussians?"

Almost as he spoke the roll of a drum was heard in the distance.

"Even now the enemies of France are approaching!" he said, excitedly.

These words, which had not been uttered aimlessly by

any means, were the signal for a frightful tumult. The bravest of the audience rushed toward the door; the *echers* invaded the vacant space in front of the table, and began to clamor for the death of the prisoners. The most violent even attempted to seize Podensac and Saint Senier, who managed to keep them at a respectful distance, however. It would be impossible for them to withstand such a large number of assailants long, however, and the two friends would certainly have been overpowered and dragged from the room, if something had not unexpectedly occurred to change the aspect of affairs.

The long-haired individual who had modestly remained in the background up to the present time, now took a long stride that placed him in the center of the group assembled in front of the committee.

"By virtue of my position as a member of the committee I ask a hearing," he said, in drawling tones.

"It is the clown we met in the forest of Saint Germain!" exclaimed Podensac. "I knew I had seen him somewhere before."

"It is that tall fellow who talks so well," murmured the faithful *habitués* of the club.

Though greatly annoyed at the interruption, Taupier dared not refuse the request of such an influential colleague.

"Speak, citizen," he said; "but be brief, for the people are waiting."

"Citizens," began Alcindor, "what do you desire? That justice shall be done, and traitors punished, do you not?"

"Yes, yes; shoot them! shoot them!"

"I, too, desire it," continued the orator. "Like you, I feel sure that these men are emissaries of the legitimists, and as such deserve death."

"Cur!" hissed Podensac.

"That is true! Death to them! death to them!" yelled the crowd.

"But, citizens, do you know what hostages are?"

This question caused a confused murmur, which indicated that the assemblage did not have any very clear ideas on the subject.

"Hostages," continued Alcindor, "have served as a protection against the cruelty of an enemy from the earliest antiquity. They are prisoners retained, meanwhile notifying the reactionists that they will be shot the very day their friends dare to lay violent hands on any member of our great and noble league."

"That's not a bad idea!" shouted several voices.

Taupier frowned darkly.

"I believe the eventual triumph of the people is certain," continued the orator, "but we may be obliged to wait, and who knows but one of us may fall into the hands of the supporters of tyranny?"

"There's a good deal of truth in what he says!" exclaimed one.

"He's a sensible fellow, unquestionably," remarked another.

"Who knows but at this very moment the government is preparing for an attack, and that by this evening, in an hour, perhaps, they will secure possession of Montmartre and seize the members of the committee you have chosen?"

"Nonsense!" growled the hunchback.

"The drum you heard just now is, perhaps, the signal for the attack."

Several communists, impressed by the justice of this argument, started for the door.

"Ah, well, citizens, in the event of such a calamity we should have two prisoners whose lives would insure the safety of such of our comrades as might be captured by the gendarmes."

A murmur of approbation greeted this conclusion.

"All this is absurd," shouted Taupier, anxious to see these two dangerous individuals safely disposed of then and

there. "Do you imagine that the monarchists set any great value on the lives of these two individuals? Not enough to prevent them from shooting you, if they catch you, I can tell you."

"Pardon me, Citizen President, pardon me," persisted Alcindor. "You forget that one of these men is, or has been, an officer in that Guard Mobile which has always been the mainstay of the government we have just overturned."

"Another good reason for sending a bullet through his brains," said the hunchback, shrugging his shoulders.

"Besides, he is of noble birth, one of the scions of the arrogant race that ground our fathers in the dust. His family is rich and powerful, and to secure his release they would release at least a dozen of our men. As for the other prisoner," continued the imperturbable Alcindor, "he is not a nonentity by any means, and—"

"I should think not, indeed," interrupted Podensac. "If my friend is worth ten of your National Guards, I am certainly worth thirty, for he is only a lieutenant, while I'm a major. If you don't believe me, I'll show you my commission," he added, putting his hand in his pocket.

"Oh, we don't want to see your papers," cried the infuriated hunchback.

"But *you* know me, and the others don't," retorted Podensac.

Then, turning to the audience, he said, lightly:

"You, of course, are not aware, citizens, that Taupier and I are old friends. One wouldn't imagine it, would one, seeing his anxiety to dispatch me to the other world."

Taupier saw that his audience was turning against him, and the fact exasperated him beyond endurance.

"Yes; I do know you," he cried, with a furious gesture. "I know you, and know that you acted as a spy for the Prussians. I caught you at it at Rueil."

"At the establishment of Mouchabeuf—your own particular friend—"

"Citizens, you are wandering from the subject," interposed Alcindor.

Taupier saw that he had made a blunder, and instantly changed his tone.

"Come, Citizen Panaris, let us look at the matter in a sensible light," he said more gently. "You advocate keeping these two traitors as hostages in order to exchange them in case of need; but if the reactionists should take the heights they will capture the prisoners at the same time they capture us, so do me the favor to explain what good it will do us to have them in our custody."

"That's true! That's a fact!"

"Citizen President, I advocate keeping them, but not keeping them here."

"But where, pray? Are we masters of the prisons? Have you the keys of the Roquette in your pocket?"

"We shall have them to-morrow."

"That is very possible; but if the gendarmes should take the heights in the meantime we should be caught, and these two traitors will be released."

"Never! I know a place where nobody can find them; and I will take them there if some of these good citizens will accompany me."

"Yes, yes, we'll go with you!" cried the communists with remarkable unanimity.

Taupier clinched his fists in impotent rage on seeing his prey thus escape him. Podensac was delighted, and Saint Senior too, felt that a respite meant deliverance.

But the two friends shared the same ideas in relation to Alcindor. They both wondered if he really meant what he had said about keeping them as hostages, or if this was only a pretext for saving them. The major inclined to this last opinion, for he could not believe that Alcindor's brief political career could have transformed him into a blood-thirsty monster.

"I begin to believe that we shall get out of the scrape

after all," Podensac said to himself as he exchanged glances with his companion in misfortune.

"The committee, however, must know where these prisoners are to be taken," remarked the hunchback, "so I am obliged to ask Citizen Panaris to confide his plan to me.

"Willingly, Citizen President; but I am going to confide it to you alone, for I don't want our hostages to know where I intend to take them."

Alcindor approached the table and bent over to whisper a few words in the hunchback's ear—no easy matter, by reason of the disparity in height.

After a brief conversation Alcindor stepped back, and Taupier rose and solemnly gave orders for the removal of the prisoners.

"I hope you're not going to blindfold us here," said Podensac. "I've no desire to break my neck on the steps."

"No, no, citizen. It will be time enough when we get into the street," replied Alcindor, with a friendly air.

"Forward, then!" cried the major, with as much spirit as if he were still at the head of his men.

When Roger and Podensac reached the garden they found everything changed.

The crowd had increased to an alarming extent. A swarm of disreputable-looking men, clad in blouses, viragos in rags, and hardened *gamins* had invaded the place. The men were armed with guns, the women with sticks and clubs, and the children with stones.

This was an army of the slums. The advent of the prisoners was greeted with savage yells, and the friends perceived that the greatest danger was still to be confronted.

Their guard was trying to clear the way for them, and Alcindor was about to harangue the people when a window opened.

"Citizens!" cried the shrill voice of Taupier, "make way for two spies that the committee is reserving for future punishment."

The wretch had carefully calculated the effect of these ambiguous words.

There was a howl of rage from the crowd.

"No, no! Put them to death, here and now!"

This blood-thirsty cry burst from a hundred throats, and the furious mob rushed upon the prisoners.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DURING the gloomy days of the Commune, Saint Germain, which is by far the prettiest town in the environs of Paris, became the favorite refuge of those who desired to escape the tyranny of the Reds.

The life they led there, however, was not a gay one, for the terrible struggle that was going on in Paris was naturally a source of intense anxiety to these poor exiles.

There was scarcely one who had not left a son, a brother, a relative or a dear friend at the mercy of the insurgents, or had some loved one in the army of Versailles which was fighting almost every day.

How they crowded around the bulletin boards, and around the side wall of the church which had the privilege of bearing the official reports of the government.

This spot naturally became the rendezvous of the refugees, and evenings when the air was warm and the foliage fresh, one might have supposed one's self at a fashionable watering-place.

One Sunday about the middle of May, after a very warm day, there was not an unoccupied seat in front of the pavilion of Henry IV., and upon the broad band of turf that borders the park. *Lorgnettes* were leveled upon the horizon where the smoke of cannon was plainly visible; and everybody was talking of the effect of the formidable battery at Montretoul which had made the walls of the old chateau tremble the night before.

The crowd did not extend beyond the round point in

front of the entrance of the forest, and beyond this grass-covered esplanade several little groups might have been seen leaning sadly over the massive stone balustrade.

It was the retreat of the anxious and despondent—of those who wished to hold themselves aloof from the gay throng further down the terrace.

On a rustic bench beneath the drooping branches of a giant elm sat Renée de Saint Senier gazing sadly in the direction of Paris.

She was dressed in mourning, and looked even paler than usual. An open book she had been trying to read was lying in her lap. Her face, once so sweet and gentle, now wore an expression of cold determination, and sorrow had left its impress upon each pure feature.

The faithful Landreau was standing beside his mistress. He too had changed greatly. His hair was much whiter; the furrows in his cheeks had deepened, and his broad shoulders were bowed. He had shaved off his beard and substituted a black livery for his uniform.

The old soldier had resumed his position of servant in the Saint Senier household; and one could read in his eyes that he was ready to defend the young girl as he had defended Lieutenant Roger.

"Mademoiselle," he ventured timidly, "the air is growing cool, and it would perhaps be well for you to return home."

"No news yet, no news!" murmured Renée, despondently.

"Alas! no, mademoiselle," sighed Landreau. "I have just returned from the post-office, and I am sure that there is no letter for us there, for the clerks are beginning to know me, and as soon as they see me at the window they shake their heads to give me to understand that the mail has brought nothing for us."

"Yet I have been waiting two long months," said the young girl bitterly.

"But you must not worry like this, mademoiselle. You

will certainly get sick again: I don't think it at all strange that we receive no letter. No mails have left Paris for more than three days remember."

Renée shook her head sadly; and poor Landreau dared not say any more.

"If you wish it I will go to the city myself," he added, after a short silence.

"You have incurred danger enough already my good friend," replied the young girl, sadly.

"If the danger had been all, I should have gone long ago without saying a word to you," exclaimed the worthy game-keeper, "but I dare not leave you anywhere in this accursed country except at the Château de Saint Senier; for if those villains should get as far as here who would you have to protect you?"

Renée made a gesture that said plainly enough that life was a burden to her.

"Oh, do not despair, mademoiselle," murmured the old servant; "something tells me that Monsieur Roger is alive, and that you will see him again; for—"

The sullen roar of cannon interrupted him.

The batteries on Mont Valérien and Montretoul had both opened fire at the same time.

"Do you hear that, mademoiselle? do you hear that?" exclaimed Landreau. "This certainly is the beginning of the end."

"God grant it!" murmured Renée.

"As soon as our troops enter the city you will surely allow me to go there," continued Landreau. "Then I shall not feel any anxiety about you, and I'll find my lieutenant, I promise you."

"If Roger were alive he would certainly have written to me," said Renée. "On the very evening of his arrival in Paris he wrote to me announcing the fact; and the long silence that has followed this letter can only be explained by some dire misfortune."

"But perhaps the scoundrels have put him in prison as they did me. I can not believe that God would be so cruel as to take him from us."

"Ah! God has indeed laid His hand heavily upon our little household," said the girl, gloomily. "My brother first, my more than mother next, and now—"

"Better days are coming, mademoiselle. We shall not have to suffer much more, believe me."

"A fatality seems to pursue all who are in any way connected with us. Yes, all, even to the poor child who risked her own life to save Roger, and who has again disappeared."

"You need feel no anxiety about her, mademoiselle. She is as bright and shrewd as she is good, and if she has left us it is for some good purpose. I have an idea that she will return to us one of these days; and who knows? she will perhaps bring us news of my lieutenant."

"There is some mystery in Regina's life, I feel sure," remarked Renée, after a short silence.

"I think so too," replied Landreau, promptly; "and I am sure that Pilevert could have told us a good deal about her if he had chosen to."

"He too has disappeared," said Renée, thoughtfully.

"He's no great loss, I am sure. I've always thought that he must have stolen the child from her parents when she was an infant."

"The same idea has frequently occurred to me; but though I have questioned Regina more than once on the subject, I never could induce her to tell me the secret of her birth. Perhaps she does not know herself."

"And I have tried to make Pilevert talk, but never succeeded in getting anything out of him. If I ever get hold of him again, though, he'll have to tell me all he knows."

Renée rose, and crossing the terrace, leaned her elbow upon the parapet and gazed sadly toward the fair city which, after being spared by a foreign foe, seemed about to

fall a victim to the wicked passions and rapacity of her own children.

Landreau respected the grief of his young mistress too much to say any more, though in his secret heart the faithful old servant was much more anxious than he was willing to admit.

He was aroused from his gloomy reflections by the sound of carriage wheels; and turning, he saw a shabby vehicle drawn by an old and bony horse approaching, but feeling no particular interest in the vehicle or its occupant, Landreau paid no further attention to it until he saw it stop on the hill in front of him, and heard a voice cry out—

“My friend, which road must I take to reach the Grand Vainqueur?”

The voice made a much deeper impression on Landreau than the question, for he felt sure he had heard it before; so to satisfy his doubts he approached the carriage and found himself face to face with the driver, who had leaned out at the same time.

“What! is it you?”

“The old gamekeeper, as I live!”

The two exclamations were uttered simultaneously.

Pilevert and Landreau had recognized each other.

“Where did you come from?” inquired the old gamekeeper.

“From Poissy, and—even further,” replied the acrobat; “and very glad I am to find you here, for I was looking for you.”

“For me!” repeated Landreau in considerable surprise.

“That is to say, I am looking for the young lady—your mistress, I mean, of course.”

“Don’t speak so loud. She is standing over there. I’ll go and tell her that you wish to see her.”

“It isn’t worth while. Just hold Cocotte a minute and I’ll go and speak to her myself.”

Landreau complied with the request, though it did not

appear at all necessary, for the horse did not evince the slightest desire to move.

Renée was still leaning upon the balustrade absorbed in a gloomy reverie; and after smoothing his hair and whiskers Pilevert approached her, hat in hand, giving a slight cough to attract her attention.

Mlle. de Saint Senier turned and gazed at him with evident astonishment.

"Madame does not recognize me," stammered the acrobat. "When I say madame, I mean mademoiselle."

Renée did not recognize him for two very excellent reasons. In the first place, she had scarcely seen him since the scene at Molinchar'd's house, and in the second place Pilevert had changed his style of dress and looked very much like a farmer now in his broad-brimmed hat, his long brown coat and nankeen trousers.

"I am the man, you know, that went to Montmartre—with your cousin—the day he rescued you," he stammered.

Renée's face brightened.

"I recognize you perfectly, now, sir," she said; offering him her hand; "and I have not forgotten the service you rendered me."

"Oh, that is not worth mentioning! How is Monsieur Roger?"

The girl turned pale and was obliged to catch at the balustrade for support, for Pilevert had unwittingly touched a grievous wound.

"My cousin returned to Paris after you left us," she replied, with an evident effort, "and I have not seen him since."

"Good heavens! it's to be hoped that he hasn't fallen into the clutches of those 'Serpenteau' fellows!" exclaimed Pilevert. "I'd like to see them all hung, every one of them; and I believe they will be, for the Versailles troops have just entered Paris, and—"

"Are you sure what you say is true," asked Renée in great agitation.

"A man I met just now in the forest told me so; and I have an idea that he knew, for he looked like a fleeing communist. And how is my little Regina? You left her at home, I suppose?"

"Regina left us before my cousin did," replied Renée.

"Left you!" repeated Pilevert; "and without writing to tell me where she was going. Upon my word, that is really too bad; and I am just going to tell you the whole story. About fifteen months ago, immediately after my return from California, where I saved up just enough to buy me a horse and wagon, I was making the tour of the southern fairs in company with that fool of an Alcindor, whom I had picked up in the streets of Toulouse. One evening while on the way from Bazas to Bordeaux I saw a girl sitting by the road-side crying. I got out and asked her what the matter was. She didn't answer me, but only motioned to me that she was dumb. I pointed to my wagon, as if to tell her that I would take her along the road a piece if she wanted to go, so she got in and we rode along. Pretty soon she took a slate out of her pocket and began to write a lot of things—how she was alone in the world; that she knew how to tell fortunes; and that if I wanted her to she would tell fortunes for me in my tent on condition that I would support her and never ask her any questions about her family."

"That was very strange," murmured Renée.

"I thought so, too," answered Pilevert; "but I needed a girl just then very much to give a little variety to the entertainment, so I gladly accepted her offer; and a most excellent bargain it proved, so far as I was concerned. Three days after she began to tell fortunes and play her tricks with cards the receipts at the door had doubled. And how pretty and intelligent and genteel she was!"

"Did you ever find out anything about her relatives?" inquired Renée.

"I could never induce her to say a word about them. Whenever I attempted to question her on the subject she always snatched the pencil out of my hands and threatened to leave me then and there."

"What! you traveled with this young girl for a year, and were unable to discover anything about her past!" exclaimed Mlle. de Saint Senier. "You don't know where she came from or who she is?"

"I think I have had some idea since yesterday," replied Pilevert with a great show of mystery.

"Explain more clearly, if you please," said Renée rather dryly.

Pilevert seemed in no haste to reply. Judging from his manner one would have supposed he regretted having said as much as he had.

"Still you must recollect, mademoiselle, that when I say I think I know something about Regina's history, it does not by any means follow that I *do* know it," he said at last with some hesitation.

"But what grounds have you for this belief?"

"I have found some papers belonging to her."

Renée was so much surprised that she began to wonder if the acrobat had not lost his senses completely, for these incoherent replies gave her no definite information in regard to the subject that interested her so deeply. Besides, she felt greatly averse to continuing a conversation of this nature in such a public place, especially as two or three sentinels who were pacing to and fro seemed to regard the dilapidated vehicle and its owner with evident suspicion.

"Sir," she said with great dignity, "if you have any further information to give me, I will listen to it this evening at my residence, No. 97 Rue de Noailles."

Pilevert stepped back with an awkward bow.

"That would suit me much better," he stammered. "You see, Cocotte isn't Bradamante, though she is really a very fine animal; and when I have seen her eat her oats

"In the stable at the Grand Vainqueur I can tell you my story much better. I'll be at your house in an hour."

As he spoke he jumped into his wagon, whipped up his horse, and in another minute or two disappeared behind the trees.

Landreau approached his mistress and was struck by the change in her expression, for the air of sadness had given place to one of singular animation.

"Let us return home at once," she said quickly; and the old gamekeeper had sufficient tact to see that any comment or question would be decidedly unwelcome, so he followed his young mistress home in silence.

The Rue de Noailles is only a short distance from the park, and in a few moments they reached the cottage that Mlle. de Saint Senier had rented.

Landreau received orders to admit Pilevert as soon as he presented himself; and the acrobat had the good sense not to keep them waiting.

The hour that he was to devote to his own supper and that of his steed had not elapsed when he rang at the door of the house on the Rue de Noailles.

He entered with an air of secrecy that harmonized well with the long overcoat with three capes in which he was enveloped. This soiled garment seemed to conceal something that the acrobat was holding tightly under his arm, and after a low obeisance he unbuttoned the coat, and drew out a long box, which he deposited upon Mlle. de Saint Senier's work-table.

"You will find Regina's history there," he said without any preamble whatever.

It was a box of some foreign wood bound with steel, and it was considerably decayed, either from the action of time or of dampness.

The lock, too, was rusty.

"Look inside and read what you find there, mademoiselle," Pilevert added, with an important air, as he opened the box,

Under any other circumstances Mlle. de Saint Senier would certainly have asked some further questions before proceeding to examine the contents of the casket; but the profound interest she felt in Regina prevented anything like hesitation.

She leaned over the open casket, and with a trembling hand drew out, first, a portrait. It was a miniature in an oval case.

"Regina!" exclaimed Renée.

"Ah! you recognized it at the first glance," cried Pilevert, naively. "I never should have seen the resemblance if I hadn't read the papers first."

The portrait was that of a little girl about eight years of age; and one must have studied Regina's face carefully to be able to discern her features in this childish picture; and yet when one looked at it closely doubt was an impossibility.

Above all, one could not mistake the eyes.

"Read! read! What you find there will astonish you!" said the acrobat pointing to the papers in the bottom of the box.

Regina drew one out and unfolded it with a trembling hand.

It was a letter written on a large sheet of paper yellow with time.

"Regina, my dear daughter," read Renée. "You are still a child; but I am sure you have not forgotten your father. The day I pressed you to my heart on the wharf at Bordeaux before going aboard the ship that was to take me to Mexico, I little thought that I should never see you again.

"God has so decided, however. I have fallen into the hands of enemies of France. They have condemned me to death, and to-morrow morning I shall fall under their bullets, blessing you with my latest breath.

"Your poor mother died in bringing you into the world;

and you will consequently be obliged to fight the battle of life alone now, so I am obliged to speak to you as if you had already arrived at years of understanding.

“The ladies to whose care I intrusted you before my departure were paid for your board and education for three years in advance. At the end of that time I trust they will secure you a position as governess in some honorable family if they can not keep you any longer in their school.

“I had dreamed of a different fate for you; but the bad luck that seems to pursue our family is not yet exhausted. Your grandfather died a victim to the civil war that desolated our country several years before your birth.

“I had a brother; and I hoped he would assist me in raising the fallen fortunes of our house; but political differences have transformed him into my bitterest enemy; and if ever this unprincipled brother—his name is Charles—dares to assert any authority over you, reject with loathing the guardianship and protection of one who has dishonored our name.

“I do not altogether despair, however. One hope remains; and my grounds for this hope are based entirely upon the document I inclose in this letter.

“It is the will of Edmund du Luot, my most intimate friend, who, prior to his departure for California, insisted upon bequeathing his fortune to you.

“Edmund used to play with you when you were a mere infant; and perhaps you can still recollect the long mustache that you used to pull so savagely.

“Forgive me, my beloved daughter, for speaking of these matters when I have so short a time in which to tell you that your father loves you with his whole heart and that his last thought will be of you.

“Farewell, Regina, farewell! My heart is breaking at the thought of leaving you forever; and I have only strength to implore you to never forget your father,

“GEORGE DE NOIRVAL.”

Mlle. de Saint Senier dropped the letter in silence. She was too deeply moved to utter a word. Her eyes were full of tears, and her lips quivered.

"Go on! go on! There are other papers in the box," insisted the acrobat.

Renée hesitated, but only for an instant; then she drew out first a certificate of the birth of Regina Louise Gabrielle de Noirval, and afterward the will of a certain Count de Luot, who made her his sole legatee.

Mlle. de Saint Senier felt a vague suspicion that some attempt had been made to rob the orphan of her inheritance; but she did not imagine for an instant that there could be any connection between this sad story and the misfortunes that had befallen her during the past year.

All the names she had just read were strange to her.

"Noirval!" she repeated thoughtfully. "I never met a person of that name."

"Nor have I," growled Pilevert; "but Noirval sounds devilishly like Valnoir, it seems to me."

CHAPTER XXVII.

ON the following Tuesday Montmartre was again the scene of many thrilling events.

The mountain that had witnessed the birth of the insurrection had become its last stronghold.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning, and ever since early dawn the Versailles troops had been gradually closing in around the retreat of the insurgents, carrying one after another the formidable barricades that protected every approach to Montmartre.

A lively fusillade was in progress on the outer boulevard, the fighting being particularly fierce around the Place Blanche and the Place Pigalle, but the frenzied defenders of the Commune still held out behind their breastworks of paving-stones.

The shameless red flag still floated, too, over Dr. Molin-chard's hospital where the insurgents had established their head-quarters.

The place was well chosen for a desperate resistance. Protected by the escarpments that cut the hill on every side, and surrounded by artillery that launched its bombs, at hazard, upon the public buildings and museums, the villa on the heights seemed well-nigh impregnable.

It had undergone an entire change of aspect since the 18th of March. The sick and wounded had vacated it; the hospital had been transformed into barracks, and the main court-yard had become an arsenal. As for Dr. Molin-chard, he devoted his days to amputations, and his nights to guarding his prisoners—for he had prisoners—and his duties as a jailer were even more arduous than as a surgeon.

Mother Ponisse had very naturally resumed the business of cantinière, and the communists drank so heavily that she was in a fair way to make a fortune. On that particular day, however, the virago and her employer were scarcely equal to the duties that devolved upon them, so great was the crowd of intoxicated and wounded men that flocked to the villa on the heights, so they troubled themselves very little about what was going on inside the villa, all the gates being carefully guarded.

In the most retired corner of the desolate garden in which Renée had suffered so much, Roger de Saint Senior and Podensac stood listening to the cannonade.

"The fire seems to be slackening," remarked the former commander of the Enfants Perdus.

"A bad sign," said Roger, shaking his head sadly.

"That depends," retorted Podensac, quickly. "They always cease firing, you know, when they are about to charge with the bayonet."

"But in that case, we should hear them sounding the charge."

"That's by no means certain. The wind isn't the right way."

"Listen! there is firing in the direction of La Chapelle. The troops must be retreating."

"On the contrary, I think they are making a circuitous movement," replied the major, who was something of a strategist. "Probably they are going around so as to attack Montmartre in the rear."

"But the day they brought us here, the north side of the mountain seemed to be as well protected with guns as the side overlooking Paris."

"Zounds!" exclaimed Podensac, whose anger was always aroused to the highest pitch by any allusion to his arrest, "just to think that but for that fool of a clown, we should probably have been taken to the prison of Cherche Midi, and been free by this time."

"On the contrary, I think we should have been shot, but for him," replied Saint Senier.

"And who knows but we shall be shot now?" growled the major. "I'll settle with him, if I ever get hold of him," he added, clenching his fist.

"I am ready to die," murmured Roger, "but I should like to have a weapon to defend myself."

"And so would I! And we have nothing, not even so much as a stick or a stone!"

"Listen!" exclaimed Saint Senier, seizing his friend's arm.

This time there could be no mistake. The shrill notes of the bugle were resounding in the distance, and the firing began again, fast and furious.

"It's the assault. They're advancing on the double-quick!"

"Live the regulars!"

These transports of joy were interrupted by excited cries and hurried footsteps inside the house.

"They are coming to release us!" cried Roger.

"Say rather to murder us!" muttered Podensac.

The two friends walked together to the door of the little drawing-room, and stood there, pale, but resolute, prepared to meet their fate courageously.

It was the livid face of Molincharde that first appeared, out behind him were five or six communists with disheveled hair, faces black with powder and clothing in tatters.

They had guns in their hands, and they were all shouting and yelling at the top of their voices, though it was impossible to distinguish anything but frightful oaths.

"What do you want?" demanded Podensac, clinching his fists.

"Come, citizens, come, quick," replied Molincharde, in a voice hoarse with emotion.

"Where do you propose to take us?" asked Saint Senier, his eyes flashing ominously.

"Come, come! we've no time for ceremony."

"No one intends to harm you," Molincharde added, hastily. "Come, I beseech you. We haven't a minute to lose."

"Very well," replied Podensac, thrusting the trembling surgeon aside.

Roger stepped to his friend's side, and together they walked down the long passage that connected the cottage with the main building, and on to the open door at the further end of it.

A strange sight awaited them. At least a hundred armed communists crowded the narrow esplanade that surrounded the high walls of the hospital. In one corner were several wounded men to whom their comrades seemed to pay no attention whatever.

In the midst of the crowd a man, gorgeous in gold lace, was clinging awkwardly to the saddle of a gray horse. Two men were standing near by, gesticulating excitedly; one was holding a red rag aloft at the end of a pole, the other was brandishing a large cavalry saber.

These men seemed to be not only the leaders, but the speakers of the party, for the prisoners had scarcely appeared upon the threshold when the man with the flag addressed them as follows:

"Now, try to answer me honestly, if you can. The Versailles troops are coming up the Rue Lepic, and we have no time to lose. You have served in the army, haven't you?"

"I was in command of the Enfants Perdus of the Rue Manbuée," replied Podensac, promptly, "and my friend here was an officer in the Mobiles."

"That is all we want to know," interrupted the orator of the occasion. "You must know how to command, then."

"French soldiers, yes!" replied Roger, proudly, for he was beginning to understand the situation.

"Very well. Now you will command the soldiers of the Commune."

"Never!" exclaimed the prisoners in the same breath.

"There are more than a hundred of us here," but we know nothing about strategy, as that fool there on horse-back calls it, and we need experienced soldiers to organize the defense."

"Find one, then," replied Podensac, calmly.

"You can do as you please, of course," was the prompt retort, "but if you refuse, we'll have you placed over there against the wall, and shot before you can say Jack Robinson."

"Consent, citizen, consent!" cried the man on horse-back. "The defense will be a very easy matter, and I will aid you with my counsels, if necessary."

"Alcindor, as I live!" muttered the major, who had just recognized Master Antoine Pilevert's former pupil in the wearer of the gorgeous uniform.

Roger took a step forward and looked the communist orator full in the face.

"You can kill us," he said, firmly, "but you shall never make us traitors."

Podensac said not a word, but he took his friend's hand and pressed it warmly.

"So be it!" yelled the bandit, flourishing his saber. "You can die, then, and when those scoundrels get here, they will find only your carcasses riddled with bullets."

The two friends looked at each other, and Roger slipped his hand through his friend's arm.

"We are ready," he said quietly. "Where are we to place ourselves?"

It was seldom, indeed, that the communists witnessed such a display of political or even military stoicism, and Saint Senier's courageous reply seemed to make quite an impression upon the by-standers.

"He's got good grit in him and no mistake," muttered the holder of the saber.

But his companion with the flag seemed to be considerably disconcerted, and it was very evident that they would have greatly preferred the two officers' assistance to the unpleasant necessity of having them shot.

Alcindor seemed to share this feeling, and he did not deem it beneath his dignity to make one more attempt.

Guiding his horse to the foot of the door-steps on which the two officers were standing, he drawled:

"Citizens, of course I don't want to urge you, but you will certainly allow me to remind you that on the memorable 18th of March I saved your lives. But for my intervention, you would have fallen victims to the bullets of the same men who now ask your aid through me."

This insinuating speech seemed to be addressed especially to Podensac, and the major listened to it with profound attention.

He hesitated for a moment, as if undecided what to reply, then giving Roger a slight nudge by way of a warning, he snapped his fingers, as much as to say:

"What difference does it make, any way?"

Then, descending the steps, he exclaimed:

"Very well; I'll do it."

"Good, good!" shouted the orator of the party.

"Hurrah for the major!" shouted the very same persons who had threatened to kill him in cold blood only a minute before.

"I'll do it upon one condition," added Podensac.

"And what is that?"

"That my comrade shall be released."

This second proposal was much less graciously received.

"No, no, he will betray us to the Versailles officers," shouted the crowd.

A few voices expressed a willingness to consent to the bargain, but they were drowned in the general uproar.

Roger turned pale on hearing Podensac's generous offer to sacrifice himself for his sake. He was divided between a very natural desire to escape certain death and a regret at being obliged to owe his life to a compromise of such a nature.

The man with the saber assumed the responsibility of settling the difficulty.

"We can not release the officer," he said, curtly, "but we will promise not to hurt him, and he shall be allowed to smoke his pipe in peace while we are fighting. Will that satisfy you?"

"Yes," replied the major, promptly, for he did not want to give Saint Senier any chance to object.

"Now will two trusty men volunteer to guard the aristocrat?"

At least a dozen communists offered their services, so the man who had just uttered the request had only to make a selection.

While this was going on, Podensac had found an opportunity to whisper to his friend:

"Don't interfere. I am almost sure that I can get both of us safely out of the scrape."

Roger remained silent and motionless.

"And now, if you want me to act as your leader, you must obey me implicitly," continued the former commander of the Enfants Perdus.

"Yes, yes!"

"The destinies of the people are in your hands!" cried the solemn Alcindor, impressively.

"All right," responded Podensac lightly; "but while I'm saving the people, take my friend over to the foot of that low wall, and stand guard over him there. You see I'm a believer in fair play," he added.

He had commanded the residents of the Rue Maubuée long enough to learn how to talk to the masses, and his success was complete. M. de Saint Senier's guards at once proceeded to conduct him to the spot indicated, while the major gravely proceeded to issue his orders to the two leaders of the band.

The scene of the impending struggle was a slope directly in front of the villa—a hill sloping toward the north. Only a few steps from the house there was a sort of ravine protected by a low wall, and it was behind this rampart, which reached barely to his shoulders, that Roger had been placed.

The firing seemed to be coming nearer, and it was evident that the Versailles troops were making a vigorous attack upon the barricades on the southern side of the mountain, and that they were gradually gaining ground. Still, the resistance seemed to be desperate, for no wounded men or fugitives showed themselves, and the absence of these precursors of a general rout reassured the communists.

Podensac, of course, had his plans.

He did not doubt the ultimate success of the Versailles army, and hadn't the slightest intention of fighting against it, though the idea of betraying the communists into the

hands of their enemies was equally repugnant to him, so he decided upon a medium course, which consisted in stationing his men at such points as would insure them a good chance to retreat when the moment of the assault came.

He, for his own part, intended to take no part whatever in the struggle, and he had resigned himself in advance to the possible consequences of this inaction.

"Nonsense!" he said to himself, "there is very little danger of my receiving a bullet from the Versailles troops, especially as I intend to make off, taking my friend Saint Senier with me, as soon as the row begins."

And it was for this reason that the major had placed Roger near the edge of the little plateau.

"I want him where I can put my hand on him at the critical moment," he said to himself, and as he passed the prisoner, who was leaning tranquilly against the wall between his two guards, Podensac gave him a look that said as plainly as any words, "Hold yourself in readiness."

The man with the saber was just giving a very different order to his subordinates.

"If the aristocrat makes any attempt to escape," he cried, "blow his brains out, and be quick about it."

This savage order did not alarm the lieutenant much, however, for he felt sure the communists would become utterly demoralized when they saw the regulars approaching, and that they would think only of making their escape; so he did not interfere.

The little body of men of which he had become the unwilling leader obeyed his instructions with marvelous docility, for a consciousness of their danger had produced a willingness to obey, even in the most rebellious.

Besides, the man with the saber and the color-bearer had constituted themselves officers, and would not have countenanced the slightest breach of discipline.

Podensac had selected the houses overlooking the esplanade of the Moulin de la Gallette, and about three hun-

dred yards from it, as the point to be defended, and the little band soon disappeared around the corner of Dr. Molinchart's establishment, leaving Saint Senior alone with his guards on the little plateau which had been the scene of such confusion a few minutes before—and with the prudent Alcindor, who did not feel obliged to follow his comrades.

"Cavalry can not fight in the streets," he said, as he watched the little procession file by; so he continued to cling to his richly decorated saddle, which must have been stolen from some officer.

Roger troubled himself very little about this grotesque personage, however. He was too deeply absorbed in his own reflections to even gaze at the magnificent panorama spread out before him. From the spot where he stood he could see the whole of the immense horizon that incloses the Plain Saint Denis. The hills of Orgemont and the woods of Montmorency were bathed in sunlight, and a little further on he could discern the Prussian flag floating over the fort at Aubervilliers—a sign of foreign invasion seemed to have been planted there to render the civil war still more odious.

Seen from this point the city seemed perfectly quiet, and even around the bastions at the foot of Montmartre no smoke or sign of fighting was visible.

But on the other side of the hill the cannon were bellowing forth defiance, and so heavy was the firing that the very mountain shook and trembled as if it were about to crumble into dust.

It was evident that the end was fast approaching, and Saint Senior's guards began to manifest unmistakable signs of uneasiness.

Their eyes were continually turning in the direction Podensac had taken, and they were evidently holding themselves in readiness to flee at the slightest alarm.

Roger was thinking of Renée, however, and by a singular

freak of the imagination there arose before him the forests and turrets of the old chateau, where he first saw in his beautiful cousin's eyes that his love was returned.

These reflections were interrupted by the shrill whistle of a bullet. The projectile had passed only a few inches above Roger's head, and had probably grazed Alcindor's horse, for that peaceable animal began to prance about in a rather alarming fashion, and so grotesque was the appearance of his frightened rider that Roger could hardly help laughing.

His two guardians evinced no desire to laugh, however, but exchanged terrified glances as if wondering whence this unwelcome visitor came.

"They're coming," growled one of the communists.

"Let's run," whispered the other.

"But what shall we do with our prisoner?"

"We'd better just knock him in the head and have done with it."

"I think we had better wait awhile. It will be time enough to put an end to him when we see our comrade returning."

Alcindor, who had finally succeeded in regaining his equilibrium, now rode up to Roger, and in the pedantic tone he always used, remarked:

"I have been trying in vain to calculate the trajectory, and I am now convinced that the projectile came from over there."

As he spoke he pointed to a row of houses at the foot of the cliff, but Saint Senier did not even take the trouble to turn and look.

"I think it would be well for me to alight from my horse," he continued; "I run a great risk of being killed if I remain in the saddle, and I ought to preserve my life if possible for the sake of the people."

"That is very excellent reasoning," said Roger, ironically, "and I am sure that your friend, the doctor, that we

see over there, would be greatly obliged to you if you would give him similar advice."

Molinchard had just reappeared upon the steps. He had disappeared during the conversation that preceded Podensac's departure, possibly with the intention of placing certain compromising papers, or dishonestly acquired securities in a place of safety.

On hearing of his comrade's return Alcindor turned his horse about to go and meet him.

It was an unfortunate thing for him that he did not obey his first impulse, however, for just as he executed this movement the unfortunate youth swayed from one side of the saddle to the other, and then fell face downward upon his horse's neck.

He tried to catch at the reins, but in another instant he relaxed his hold and fell heavily to the ground, crying:

"Help! I'm killed! I'm killed!"

The blood gushed from his mouth as he uttered this last despairing cry, and the guards, forgetting their orders, sprung forward to lift him, and even Roger ran to the assistance of the wounded man.

We must do Molinchard the justice to say that he reached Alcindor almost at the same instant, but the unfortunate youth was already in the agonies of death.

"The bullet entered the back and passed out below the collar bone," murmured the physician. "He is a dead man."

Alcindor tried to speak, but in vain. His face had already become livid, and his limbs rigid.

"It is all over," said Molinchard, rising to his feet, and casting an anxious glance around him. "He, too, seemed to be wondering whence the bullet had come, and to feel strongly inclined to beat a hasty retreat to the villa.

"They seem to be making a target of us," exclaimed one of Roger's guardians.

"May the devil take me if I stay here a minute longer," declared the other.

"But we can't leave our post without warning our comrades who are fighting down there."

"We'll send them word then."

"That's a good idea. Here, doctor, jump on that horse, and gallop down to the mill, and tell our friends that it's getting too hot for us up here, and that we're going to take ourselves off."

"But if I mount the horse I, too, may be killed," stammered the perplexed doctor.

"You needn't think we're going to waste time in trying to persuade you," said one of the communists, loading his gun.

Molinchard put his foot in the stirrup without an instant's delay.

Roger had remained by the body of Alcindor, and with his back to his guards.

"Now's our time," whispered one of the scoundrels, raising his gun to fire.

The marvelous changes that occurred during the next few seconds almost beggar description.

Molinchard, who had just vaulted into the saddle, had barely time to cry, "The Versailles troops! We are lost!" and to put spurs to his horse.

From his more elevated position he had caught sight of the soldiers who were scaling the walls behind the two communists.

Another cry answered his, but it was uttered by a woman.

"Roger, take care!" she cried.

Saint Senier heard it, and turned.

The movement saved his life.

The communist fired just as the lieutenant sprung toward the speaker, and the bullet did not reach him.

A dozen bayonets pierced the body of the would-be assassin, but the other scoundrel was a few feet further off, and before the soldiers could reach him he had time to discharge his weapon at the young woman who was clad in

the garb of a cantinière, and she fell into the outstretched arms of the lieutenant.

"Regina, my poor Regina!" he murmured, trying to sustain her.

But the poor girl sunk bleeding to the ground.

The soldiers who had so unexpectedly appeared made short work of the young girl's murderer, and then turned upon Roger, whom they very naturally regarded with suspicion, seeing him in such a place.

Some of these brave men had even leveled their guns at him, when a sergeant sprang between them and their intended victim, shouting:

"Stop! I know him. He's a *moblot*."

The officer who had led this bold charge was not inclined to let his men linger on the plateau, so the bugles were again sounded, and the soldiers, who proved to be volunteers instead of regulars, started off on the double quick toward the Moulin de la Galette.

Roger and the sergeant remained kneeling beside Regina.

"It is I! Pierre Bourdier!" said the sergeant, softly. "I little expected to meet you here."

Regina was half reclining, half sitting at the foot of the wall where she had fallen, and it was impossible to doubt the serious if not fatal nature of her wound.

A livid pallor overspread her delicate features, and her breathing was labored and irregular.

"If she had only listened to me she would have remained in the ambulance," muttered Bourdier; "but no, one would suppose that she suspected you were here."

"I knew it," whispered the dying girl, in a voice so faint as to hardly be audible.

"She speaks!" exclaimed the sergeant.

Roger was equally amazed at this miracle, but he lacked courage to question the fair girl who had just given her life for him.

"It seems, indeed, a miracle," muttered Bourdier.

"Still, that is no reason why we should not at least make an effort to save her. If we only had a doctor here he might—"

"Yes, yes, if we only had a doctor," repeated Roger.

"The one belonging to our regiment remained with our wounded yesterday, but the regulars must have joined our comrades by this time, and they perhaps have a surgeon with them. I'll be back in ten minutes!" cried the sergeant, starting off at full speed in the direction of the mill.

The fight was now raging furiously in this immediate neighborhood, and the shrill notes of the bugles sounding the charge rose high above the sullen roar of the distant cannon.

The bodies of the two communists were lying in a pool of blood, and only a few steps from them lay the tall form of the unfortunate clown.

The clear sunlight of a beautiful May morning was shining down upon this scene of carnage, and the birds, frightened by the clash of arms, were calling plaintively from the roof of the villa.

Regina made one supreme effort, and drew from her bosom a letter that she held out to Roger. He took it with a trembling hand, but he had not time to glance at it.

"Come closer—Roger," whispered the young girl.

He stooped until his face nearly touched hers.

"Closer—closer still!"

Their lips approached each other.

"Roger! I loved you!"

And the soul of the dying girl took flight in a chaste kiss.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE last day of this unholy strife had just dawned.

After a night disturbed by firing from the heights of Père la Chaise, where the doomed insurrectionists had taken refuge, the residents of Paris and its suburbs woke to the beautiful light of a lovely May morning.

Between Maisons Laffitte and Poissy, on the wooded slopes that extend from the Seine to the forest of Saint Germain, all nature seemed rejuvenated by the dawn of this magnificent spring morning.

It seemed as if the forest had adorned itself in its most beautiful apparel to celebrate the deliverance of Paris, and as if earth, weary of so many scenes of horror, wished to show men that their strife leaves no trace upon her flower-decked breast.

On a lovely road, not far from the place where Regina and Roger first met Pierre Bourdier several months before, two men were lying on the grass by the way-side.

The younger of the two men seemed to be overcome with fatigue. He was lying on his side, with his head resting upon his arm, and his limbs in the attitude that betrays the exhaustion produced by a long and painful walk. His companion had gathered himself up in a heap, with his chin resting upon his knees, and with his eyes and ears evidently upon the alert.

One felt sure, after a single glance at him, that he was the possessor of an iron will that dominated any physical fatigue, and the looks of contempt he cast upon his companion indicated that he did not place much dependence on him.

"It is time to start," he remarked suddenly, in a harsh, unmusical voice. "We ought to have resumed our journey an hour ago."

The man who was stretched out upon the grass did not move, however.

"Come, stir yourself," continued the first speaker. "I've no desire to get caught waiting for you."

"Very well, go on by yourself, then," replied the other, without changing his posture.

"You would be highly incensed if I should take you at your word."

"By no means, for I should be rid of your talk and of your presence."

"Indeed! I think you have no cause to complain of either. But for me you would have been shot or at least sent to prison."

"Anything would be better than the fate that awaits me," said the tired man, sullenly.

His companion burst into a loud, coarse laugh.

"Your despair amuses me very much," he remarked, mockingly, though I really fail to understand the cause of these lamentations. Are you thinking of your lost princess?"

This ironical question brought the reclining man instantly to his feet.

"I forbid you to speak of her," he said, dryly.

"Nonsense!"

"Yes, I forbid it, and if you speak another word on the subject I will leave you."

"Come, come! Don't lose your temper, I will respect the name of the noble heiress to the great house of Charmière, but it will not be on account of your threats. You know as well as I do that we can not part company."

"I know what you are going to say, but money isn't everything, and the life I have before me is not worth fighting for."

"Look here, Valnoir," said the other man, in a calmer tone, "will you listen to me, and talk the matter over a little without getting angry? You are in the depths of de-

spair because we have been beaten. The government has triumphed, and you seem to feel that all is lost. Really, I supposed you more of a man."

"But what is to become of us now?" asked Valnoir, gloomily.

"One would suppose that you were utterly unprepared for the arrival of the Versailles Army? Can it be that you really believed the bulletins we published every morning to encourage those fools?"

Valnoir's only reply was a shrug of the shoulders.

"Ah, well, I see you are more sensible than I supposed, and now that the deluge has come, we must take our precautions and protect ourselves, that is all."

"If you are referring to the few thousands we have made out of our paper, I warn you that I have no desire to eke out a miserable existence upon such a sum in some den in London or Geneva."

"For what do you take me?" asked Taupier, majestically. "You might know that I have no such absurd idea, it seems to me."

"What do you mean, then?" asked Valnoir, in some astonishment.

"I mean that you must have a very short memory if you have already forgotten what we did in this forest."

"Forgotten? No, certainly not. I have good cause to remember the place to which you are conducting me."

"On account of that duel, I suppose you mean. Upon my word I had forgotten it, and I advise you to do the same; but the casket we deposited there, my friend, is well worth the trouble of a search."

"Yes," said Valnoir, bitterly, "it is to you that I also am indebted for this burden upon my conscience. A fortune lost, my brother's child defrauded, and perhaps dead of starvation through my act. And all this in vain, for you know as well as I do that—"

"I know many things that you do not," interrupted the hunchback; "but before I tell you them I would like to review the facts a little."

"I suppose you are not going to deny that you advised me —"

"To apply for the guardianship of your niece? I not only do not deny it, but I even pride myself upon the fact. Now, let us talk the matter over a little, as I said before. Three years ago, before the establishment of the 'Serpenteau' was thought of, you were in the depth of poverty, if I remember right."

"Well, what of it? What are you driving at?"

"By the merest chance," continued Taupier, coolly, "I learned that a certain Count Luot had recently died in California, leaving a round million to a certain Gabrielle de Noirval, who had in her possession a will to that effect, which had been drawn up some time before. The friend who brought me this agreeable intelligence had been deputed to find the heiress, but did not know where to look for her; but I, who was intimately acquainted with a person known by the name of Charles Valnoir, and who knew the relationship that existed between him and this young girl, began the search, and finally discovered his niece in a boarding-school at Bordeaux."

"Yes; and you managed the affair so adroitly that the terrified young girl fled one fine morning, and has never been heard of since."

"If she was afraid of any one, it certainly was not of me, for she had never seen me, and she fled the day before I was to present myself at the boarding-school. It seems that she had no confidence in her uncle, with whom she had little or no acquaintance, and that she chose to run away rather than submit to his guardianship."

"I tell you once more that I know this story only too well," said Valnoir, impatiently. "You secured possession of the casket that contained the will and other papers,

and when the siege began you suggested the brilliant idea of burying it under an oak-tree for safe-keeping."

"And I am not sorry."

"It is very evident that you were a writer of romance before you went into politics. Your scheme might sound very well in a novel, but I don't see what advantage we are likely to derive from it. In the first place, we are by no means sure that we shall find the box where we hid it. The forest has been occupied for six months or more by the Prussians—"

"Who are very clever at discovering buried casks of wine, but who do not waste their time in aimlessly digging up the ground in a forest."

"Perhaps not; but, even admitting that the casket is still there, and that we succeed in reaching the spot where it is concealed, what can we do with it when we find it?"

"You will see."

"You forget that the production of this will is not going to give me any claim to the estate of this Luot, for it belongs to my niece. You probably forget that one inherits only at the death of one's relatives, and that this niece is likely to live much longer than her uncle."

"The young sometimes die first," said Taupier, sententiously.

"Besides, even if she should die a hundred times over I should be no better off unless I had proofs of her demise."

"That is true. I am quite as familiar with the code as you are; but I nevertheless congratulate you upon being a millionaire."

"Do stop your absurd jesting!"

"I am not jesting, for I have the certificate of your young relative's death in my pocket," responded the hunchback, coolly.

Valnoir sprung up as if the bugles of a Versailles squadron were resounding in his ears.

"You have the certificate of my niece's death?" he repeated, in accents of the profoundest astonishment.

"Yes; and it is regular in every way, I assure you."

"Give it to me, then."

"You are in a great hurry. It seems to me that it would look better for you to inquire what became of your niece before asking to see the certificate of her death."

"You are right," said Valnoir, bitterly; "and what you say reminds me that my brother's daughter disappeared a long time ago, and that if you had really found her, I should have heard of it before."

"Then you think I invented this story, I suppose?"

"I certainly do."

"Ah, well, my dear fellow, all I've got to say is that you do my imagination too much honor, for I not only found your niece, but you knew her just as well as I did."

"I wish you would stop talking in enigmas."

"This enigma is not very difficult, and I will give you the answer to it if you like."

"I suppose you have not forgotten the pretty girl who enacted the part of a fortune-teller in Pilevert's traveling troupe, and whom we saw in the woods on the morning of your famous duel."

"Who? Regina?"

"The same, my dear friend. Ah, well, I have once more seen the fact proved that all this talk about the instincts of blood is arrant nonsense, for when you saw her you little thought that you were contemplating the only heir to your illustrious name."

"You are certainly mad! My niece's name was Gabrielle."

"Yes, at the boarding-school; but in the certificate of birth that we shall find in the casket, she is designated, as they say in the courts, by the name of Regina Gabrielle Louise."

“It is only a strange coincidence, I am sure. My brother’s daughter was not dumb, while this girl—”

“Played her part as well as Fenella in the ‘Dumb Girl of Portici,’ but she could have talked if she wanted to, and she did before she died.”

“She is dead, then?”

“Didn’t I tell you that I had the certificate of her death in my pocket?”

“Look here, Taupier,” exclaimed the unfortunate editor-in-chief of the “Serpenteau,” passing his hand over his brow. “Explain more clearly, I beg of you.”

“Very well; I will take pity on you, for I perceive that you are incapable of reasoning calmly. Know then, my dear friend, that last Tuesday, while you were engaged in strapping your fair lady-love’s trunks in her house on the Place de la Madeleine, I was covering myself with glory on the heights of Montmartre.”

Valnoir could not repress a movement of mingled scorn and impatience.

“You can doubt my exploits, if you like,” continued Taupier, coolly, “but you will perhaps be willing to admit that I was at Molinchar’d’s house when the Versailles troops attacked it.”

“You were hiding in the cellar, probably, if you were in the house at all.”

“Whether I was in the cellar or elsewhere, matters very little. The fact that they did not capture me is a self-evident one. In fact, the enemy treated me with great respect, for they mistook me for a member of the Ambulance Corps, and I assisted friend Molinchar’d in caring for the wounded of both parties. While I was thus engaged, they brought in a cantinière who had received a fatal wound in the breast, and under this new disguise I recognized Pilevert’s former protégée.”

“This seems incredible!”

“But it is true, nevertheless; and you may rest as—

sured that I wasted no time in weeping over the deceased. As soon as the fighting was over, I set to work with praiseworthy zeal to establish the identity of the dead girl. In the pocket of the pretended cantinière I found papers that prevented any possibility of doubt in regard not only to her own name, but that of her father, and, arming myself with these documents, and taking two witnesses with me, I hastened to the mayor's office of the 18th Arrondissement, and had the death of Regina Louise Gabrielle de Noirval recorded in the municipal register."

Valnoir's agitation was so great that he was unable to speak.

"I even took the precaution to secure a copy of the entry," continued Taupier.

"And you have it with you?"

"As I had the honor to tell you some time ago."

"Then the property is mine?"

"Ours, you mean," corrected the hunchback.

"Ours!" repeated Valnoir. "Can it be that you consider yourself a member of my family?"

"I am aware that I have not that honor," said Taupier.

"My father was a petty grocer of Montrouge, but he never changed his name."

"Nor did mine," retorted the editor-in-chief quickly.

"Though I wrote for the press under another name, I am none the less Charles de Noirval, my niece's only heir."

"Exactly; but how can you claim the inheritance without producing the death certificate of the person referred to?"

"I can procure a copy."

"By soliciting it at the office of the Mayor of Montmartre? That would be an excellent way to insure your arrest."

"I can write from London or Geneva for it."

"In that case, are you sure that the authorities of those cities will not surrender you to the French Government?"

There is a very strong feeling against us in foreign lands, and I for my own part should be very loath to trust to the hospitality of our neighbors."

Valnoir hung his head without replying. The hunchback's argument was a sound one. He could not foresee that a day was to come when incendiaries and assassins would be insured protection on foreign shores.

"Well, my friend, all things considered, I think that my plan is better than yours," resumed the hunchback.

"What is your plan?"

"It is this: Monsieur de Luot's fortune, which consists principally of ready money, has been deposited at the French Consulate in San Francisco. Day after to-morrow we will embark at Havre for Southampton, and from there for New York, upon one of the English steamers. When we have once set foot upon the sacred soil of free America, we shall have nothing more to fear, for in that promised land extradition is a myth, and I even believe that we shall be received with open arms. Then there will be nothing to prevent you from asserting your claims through the mediation of some clever lawyer, and when the matter has been arranged, we will go on by rail to San Francisco and get the money. Do you understand now? Is this explanation sufficiently clear?"

Valnoir could not deny that it was.

"Well, supposing you are right, what are you driving at?" he inquired.

"I must call your attention to the fact that to carry out this plan successfully you must have the certificate of Regina's death immediately—that I have this document in my pocket, and that for this reason I consider myself joint heir to your niece's fortune."

"I understand. You want to sell this document to me."

"Precisely."

"Name your price."

"Oh, no, I can trust you. I feel sure that you will do

what is right by me when you get hold of the money; but—”

“There is a but, of course.”

“One never knows who is to live and who is to die, as the saying is. One of us may be arrested before we reach Havre; the steamer upon which we embark may be wrecked, the train on the Pacific Railroad may run off the track—”

“Spare me further conjectures, if you please.”

“In short, you may die, and I may survive you. Improbable as this seems, I think it only right to take my precautions, so I ask you to give me a little writing, signed and dated, by which you make me your sole legatee. Thanks to this mere formality, the Count de Luot’s fortune will not revert to the State. Regina will inherit it from him; you will inherit it from Regina, and I will inherit it from you.”

“I admire your foresight, and I will write the document at the next tavern.”

“The next tavern is a long way off. I would much rather you did it here and now.”

“But what am I to write it on—a bit of birch bark?”

“No; that might impair its validity. I have all the necessary materials here.”

As he spoke, he drew a leather roll from his pocket, and extracted from it pen, ink and paper.

“Here, my friend,” he remarked, passing them to Valnoir, “write your last will and testament, and as soon as it is signed I will give you the certificate of your niece’s death in exchange for it.”

Valnoir hesitated a moment, but afterward complied with the request, for after hastily writing a few lines he handed the paper to the hunchback, who must have found it satisfactory, for after glancing over it he surrendered to his companion the document he had procured at the mayor’s office.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHILE Valnoir and Taupier were quarreling over the property of their victim, Renée de Saint Senier was suffering the most poignant anxiety.

Soon after her interview with Pilevert, she saw the lurid glare of incendiary fires lighting up the heavens. For four evenings in succession she watched the conflagration from a distance, but great as was the horror inspired by the heinous crimes of the communists, it was not the fate of her country's capital that troubled her most.

On the contrary, she was continually asking herself if the man she loved was still living in the midst of that fiery furnace.

As soon as she learned that the troops had succeeded in gaining an entrance into the city, she endeavored in every possible way to obtain some news of him, but all her letters and messages proved unavailing.

The struggle was still going on in the streets, and the privileged few who obtained permission to enter the city found it well-nigh impossible to leave it again.

Renée, consequently, was impatiently awaiting the day when she herself would be allowed to visit the capital, and hearing, on the following Sunday morning, that the insurrection was virtually crushed, and that her intended journey would become practicable in a day or two, the girl hastily concluded her preparations for departure, and then, partly to while away the tedious hours of waiting, and partly from a very natural curiosity to see the place where her brother had been the victim of an infamous conspiracy, she decided to pay a visit to the giant oak.

Pilevert had been asked to serve as their guide on this pilgrimage; and on the afternoon of the day that was to be the last of her exile, Renée hired a light carriage, and with

Pilevert on the seat opposite her, and Landreau acting as driver, started for the Etoile du Chêne Capitaine.

The air was mild, and the blue sky was distinctly visible through the branches.

"Fine weather this," remarked Pilevert, merely for the sake of saying something, for he seemed both flattered and embarrassed by the honor conferred upon him.

But Renée did not seem to hear the commonplace remark.

"Are we far from the spot?" she inquired, with evident emotion.

"It won't take us more than half an hour at the very longest to reach it now," replied Pilevert. "I traveled over this very road the other day, after I found the box, and I am sure that we are not more than three or four miles from the tree."

Just as he gave her this assurance, the carriage reached the entrance to another road, and Landreau, who was driving, suddenly stopped his horses, uttering a cry of surprise as he did so.

Renée leaned out of the carriage to see what had caused the exclamation. She saw nothing, but the old gamekeeper had already leaped from the box, and was now running down the other road as fast as his legs would carry him. Pilevert, who was quite as much astonished as Mlle. de Saint Senier, manifested his surprise in incoherent exclamations. To these his companion paid little or no attention, however. She was too much engaged in listening to the joyful exclamations that seemed to come from a short distance down the road.

Renée thought she recognized the voice of the person with whom Landreau was conversing, and her agitation was so great that she was unable to open the carriage door. While her trembling hand was still upon the handle, the bushes on the road-side parted, and a man sprung toward the carriage.

It was Roger, pale with emotion — Roger, safe and sound.

His betrothed forgot the long days of anguish and the nights of despair through which she had passed; she even forgot her usual reserve, and threw her arms rapturously about her cousin's neck.

Landreau watched the meeting with tears of joy in his eyes.

"Ah! my lieutenant!" he exclaimed. "I knew that you would prove too clever for the scoundrels, and that I should see you again sooner or later."

"Thanks, my friend," said Roger. "I managed to escape them, but I did think for awhile that I should never see you again."

"You have passed through countless dangers, I am sure," murmured Renée.

"Yes, and had it not been for the devotion of our little friend, I should not be alive to-day," said Roger, feelingly.

"Our little friend!" repeated Mlle. de Saint Senier, bewildered.

"Yes, Regina, Regina, who threw herself between me and the wretches who were trying to take my life."

"But she is alive and well, is she not?" asked Renée, anxiously.

Then, receiving no reply:

"She is a prisoner, or wounded, perhaps," she added.

"She is dead," answered Saint Senier. "She died with your name upon her lips, and just before she breathed her last, she handed me this."

Renée took it with a trembling hand.

"It is addressed to me," she murmured, glancing at the envelope.

"Yes, it was to you that she gave her last thought," said Roger.

He had not forgotten the confession that escaped Regina

at the final moment, but he could not repeat it, not even to the woman he loved.

Mlle. de Saint Senier had opened the letter, but she was too deeply agitated to decipher the fine, close handwriting.

"Read it to me," she said, handing it back to Roger.

The young man complied in a voice that was at times almost inaudible from emotion.

"I have a presentiment that I am about to die, and I am anxious that those who received and protected me should know the melancholy story of my life.

"I am alone in the world, and to escape a bitter enemy of my father's—a man who brought dishonor upon our name—I was obliged to flee from the only asylum left me, and assume a disguise for which I have often blushed.

"Can my benefactress forgive me for having feigned dumbness in order to more effectually elude the pursuit of my persecutors? Besides, I took a solemn oath not to speak until I had unmasked the wretch whose machinations made me an orphan.

"If I succumb in the struggle, I intrust the work of avenging me to the noble young girl who so generously befriended me, and I entreat her not to refuse the souvenir I here bequeath to her."

Roger paused, surprised at finding in this letter only a rather vague expression of gratitude.

But the reason of this soon became apparent.

The envelope contained several other papers. Upon one was written the last will and testament of Gabrielle de Noirval, who made Mlle. Renée de Saint Senier her sole legatee.

The others contained a full account of her adventures, and designated the place where the casket stolen by Taupier was buried—the casket that Regina had seen him conceal on the day of the duel, and that the Prussians had prevented her from recovering.

"At the foot of the giant oak," said Roger thoughtfully, as he concluded his perusal of the papers.

CHAPTER XXX.

NIGHT was approaching, and the shadows of evening were already descending upon the large trees of the clearing where Louis de Saint Senier had fallen a victim to his opponent's bullet.

Valnoir and Taupier had spent nearly all the day in a dense thicket, from which they did not dare to emerge until nearly twilight, but the hunchback, who had spent a good deal of time in this locality, seemed to have no difficulty in finding his way through the forest.

Valnoir followed him mechanically. He had not spoken a dozen words since they started, and overcome with remorse and fatigue, he seemed to have grown more than ten years older in the past week.

Taupier, on the contrary, seemed in the best of spirits as he plodded along, whistling the popular airs of the day, and his repulsive face had not lost its usual mocking expression.

A few hundred yards from the Etoile du Chêne Capitaine, on the side of a lonely path, they came across one of the boxes in which the laborers employed in the forest keep their tools. The boards that covered it offered very little resistance to the united efforts of Taupier and his companion, who broke it open without the slightest scruple, and selected two heavy spades from its contents.

"We must make haste now," said Taupier, as he shouldered his spade. "We have only just enough daylight left to find the place."

They traversed the clearing with a rapid step and they scarcely reached the foot of the tree when the hunchback, pointing to a slight inequality in the soil, exclaimed:

"There it is!"

Without losing a second, he pulled off his coat, spat upon

his hands as if he had been a laborer all his life, and seizing his spade, exclaimed:

"Come, let's to work! We must have what we are after in five minutes, at the longest."

Valnoir did not seem to hear him. Leaning on his spade, he stood gazing abstractedly at one end of the clearing, murmuring:

"Over there, it was over there that he fell!"

Taupier's only response was a sneer.

"I can still see him lying on the grass with his ghastly face, and his hand covered with the blood that was pouring from his breast."

"Say, did you come here merely to play tragedy?" exclaimed the hunchback, shaking him roughly by the arm.

"Don't touch me. You fill me with horror!"

"I think you must have gone mad. I do upon my word!"

"No," replied Valnoir, in a tone so low as to be scarcely audible, "I am not mad; I am afraid."

"Afraid of what? Of ghosts?"

"I don't know, but I am afraid."

"You certainly are an arrant coward," said Taupier, scornfully. "It isn't worth while to be born a gentleman and be called the Count de Noirval, if one is going to act in this way."

"I forbid you to utter a name that belonged to my father—to my father who also died a violent death," he added, in a hollow voice.

"Look here!" exclaimed the hunchback with a sudden change of tone. "I really pity you; and while you are concluding your elegy, I'll go to work. You can take my place when I get tired."

And without waiting for any reply he made a vigorous attack upon the ground with his spade, and the soil yielded with a readiness that must have excited his suspicions, for he growled between his set teeth:

“Zounds! one would think this ground had been stirred lately.”

Nevertheless, he did not pause in his work, but continued to wield the spade with feverish energy.

Valnoir, leaning against the tree, watched him without appearing really conscious of what he was doing.

The sturdy hunchback displayed such zeal that in less than ten minutes he had made an excavation of very considerable depth; and as the soil offered more and more resistance as he proceeded, he became more and more sanguine of success.

Influenced by this belief undoubtedly, he paused, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and stepped out of the hole, remarking—

“It is now your turn, my friend. Your blues must have passed off by this time, and we haven’t a minute to lose.”

Valnoir still seemed loath to accept the invitation.

“Don’t be afraid; I’ll soon relieve you,” remarked Taupier. “I don’t want you to blister your lily-white hands; ~~you~~ wouldn’t like it.”

It was perhaps this foolish jest that induced the editor-in-chief of the “Serpenteau” to take his subordinate’s place. At all events, he leaped into the hole and began to dig, bending low over his spade, like a man unaccustomed to manual labor.

Taupier was directly behind him.

With a movement quicker than thought itself he lifted his spade with both hands so as to give greater power to the blow.

Valnoir was leaning over, and could not see what was going on behind him.

Suddenly the heavy spade descended upon his head with the rapidity of lightning, and Rose de Charquièr’s unfortunate lover with a shattered skull fell face downward into the hole.

The hunchback stood on the edge of the hole for a mo-

ment gazing down with dry eyes at the motionless form of this man who had been his friend; then his hideous mouth contracted to give vent to a burst of diabolical laughter.

Then brandishing his spade he added:

"The race of Noivrals will trouble me no more. I began to exterminate it on the barricade in the Faubourg du Temple in June, 1848. After waiting for twenty-three years I certainly have a right to their inheritance."

Pulling the body out of the hole Taupier resumed his work with such feverish eagerness that the excavation rapidly increased in depth.

"It is very strange," muttered the scoundrel after several minutes of arduous toil, "but it seems to me that the box was not buried so deep as this."

He continued his work, however, but with the same want of success; and after a quarter of an hour he was obliged to admit to himself that the box had disappeared.

On coming to this conclusion the hunchback uttered a growl of rage, threw aside his spade, and clambered up out of the hole.

It is more than probable that a feeling of remorse seized him now—the first that had ever visited this hardened heart. All his carefully made plans had come to naught, and Taupier found himself confronted by his ghastly crime—a crime, too, which had been worse than useless.

Exile and poverty were before him, and leaning against the trunk of the giant oak, he was thinking of the dreary future that awaited him, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

He turned hastily.

Confronting him was a man of lofty stature enveloped in a long cloak.

Taupier's first feeling was one of intense anger, and springing upon the stranger he tried to seize him by the throat, but when he found himself face to face with him he uttered a cry of terror and recoiled.

"He!" muttered the hunchback, "he!"

"The dead seize the living!" said the man in hollow tones.

On hearing these startling words, Taupier staggered like a drunken man and passed his hand across his forehead as if to recall his scattered senses.

"I call myself Justice," said the stranger, "and I come to tell you that you yourself must die on the same spot where you have twice played the assassin."

Then, and not until then, did Taupier recognize his first victim, Louis de Saint Senier, who appeared before him like a grim specter just risen from the grave.

Rence's brother, pale and threatening, held a pistol in each hand, and seemed resolved to offer his assassin an opportunity to resume the combat in which he himself had been unfairly worsted several months before.

Frenzied with rage and terror, Taupier seized one of these weapons and endeavored to wrest it from his opponent's grasp, but in this frantic attempt his fingers touched the trigger.

The bullet pierced his heart, and the infamous wretch fell upon Valnoir's body.

Regina was avenged!

The strange events that brought about this tragical *dénouement* are such as occur only during great social crises.

The war and the insurrection that had laid waste the fair land of France could alone develop characters similar to those which have figured in this story.

Had it not been for the siege of Paris and the misfortunes which had resulted from it for several members of his family, Louis de Saint Senier, who had miraculously recovered from his wound, would not have been obliged to conceal himself so long in the cottage on the Rue de Laval.

He had spent long months there while he was hanging between life and death, and he left the sick-room for the

first time on the night that Frapillon received his chastisement from Roger's hand.

Immediately after this catastrophe the invalid departed secretly for the Château de Saint Senier with those who bore his name.

He had not been strong enough to accompany his sister to Saint Germain; but as soon as he found himself able to make the journey he started to rejoin her.

While passing through the forest he was seized with a sudden desire to once more behold the place where he had so narrowly escaped death; and God—who punishes all murderers sooner or later—God had done the rest.

Renée's marriage was solemnized in the chapel at Saint Senier early in the autumn, and the newly married couple left for Italy the next day.

Podensac has abandoned military and commercial pursuits to take charge of the Saint Senier estate, which he manages admirably.

Louis de Saint Senier resumed his position in the navy, and is now about to start on a trip around the world.

Rose de Charmière has taken up her abode in Berlin, this change of residence being due to her infatuation for an officer of cuirassiers whose acquaintance she made at Saint Denis during the Commune.

Pilevert has accepted the position of gamekeeper at Saint Senier, Landreau having retired from active service.

Molinchard is in London, keeping a restaurant, which is largely patronized by members of the famous "Society of the Moon with the Teeth," and this being the case, it is scarcely probable that he finds the business very lucrative.

